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**PEASANTRY AND CRISIS  
IN FRANCE**





PEASANTRY AND CRISIS  
IN FRANCE

by

NEIL HUNTER

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# PEASANTRY AND CRISIS IN FRANCE

## INTRODUCTION

ON JANUARY 20TH, 1919, a French man-of-letters posted in his personal diary an entry of which Time has shown the prophetic inspiration.

"A *bloc* is now in process of formation," wrote Romain Rolland, "from the still massive ruins of Imperial militarism and the puny Machiavellis of parliamentary socialism. Let the Entente beware! It is hypnotised by the social danger of the Spartacists. But it does not see that the Spartacists embodied the spirit of reconciliation between the peoples, and that in the new *bloc* of Scheidemann—Erzberger—Noske—Ludendorff (for the general is always lurking behind the scenes) there are incorporated ideas of national revenge and inextinguishable hatred. Already they are finding abundant expression."<sup>1</sup>

Few to-day are those who would find themselves disposed to question the justice of these words. We live, alas, in days when the catastrophe of another war is one for which all the nations of Europe are prepared even if they are in no way resigned to it.

Should war come, our own country, centre of a world-wide empire, could not fail to become involved.

And the barriers, erected with so much care to guard against a repetition of the disaster of 1914 are giving way

<sup>1</sup> "Clarté"; April, 1937

one after another! With each fresh collapse of the peace-structure an instinct of self-preservation impels the peoples to take stock of their position; lest all too soon they may find themselves isolated and without allies in the path of oncoming destruction.

The feeling in favour of asserting and strengthening the bonds between the peace-loving masses of all countries is at least as strong here as elsewhere. From it arises our desire, almost passionate at times, to be well informed as to what others are thinking. We desire earnestly to know what thoughts are in the minds of people in other countries, first and foremost our near neighbours the French, with whose fate our own seems inextricably to be intertwined.

It was not always so. The accession of Queen Victoria preceded that of her great-grandson by exactly one hundred years. A century is not a long time in history. And yet the problem of national safety has changed out of all recognition in the interim. Not that the problem did not exist in Victorian times: it was the Queen herself who wrote (in 1879):

“If we are to maintain our position as a first-rate power, we must, with our Indian Empire and large colonies, be prepared for attacks and wars somewhere or other continually. And the true economy will be to be always ready.”

But if the problem of national survival remains, the possible manner of its solution has undergone a complete process of transformation. The Victorians were proud of living in their “right little, tight little island”. So long as the British Navy could keep command of the seas and ensure the victualling of the home population, British statesmen could pin their faith to the Blue Water conception of national strategy, and could afford to disinterest

themselves largely from concern with contemporary happenings on the European continent.

When the armies of the King of Prussia over-ran French territory in 1870 Great Britain was able to observe a position of neutrality and was not involved in the war.

Yet even then the situation was changing, and by the end of the nineteenth century, British sea-supremacy was no longer going unchallenged. A great effort was now required to maintain that ratio of naval strength which was measured by the "two-power standard".

Nineteen-fourteen indeed showed that British sea-power was no longer a decisive factor in deciding the issue of peace and war. Not only so, but the successful preservation of the country's independence, achieved at so vast a cost in lives and treasure, was clearly the result of factors amongst which British naval might was only one of several. And since the close of the last war, British naval strength has itself undergone a process of diminution in relation to the strength of other naval powers. There are now parts of the globe in which it finds itself in unmistakable inferiority. New weapons of attack have come into existence against which the navy's powers of defence have yet to be demonstrated as being adequate. The degree to which means at the disposal of the Admiralty would be sufficient to ensure the food-supply of these islands in time of war is by no means certain.

If the outlook is obscure at sea it is doubly so on land, for the coming of the aeroplane has manifestly robbed our coasts of all former pretensions to inviolability. We are already grown accustomed to the thought that our cities and ports are even more accessible to bombardment and destruction from the air than many a centre on the European mainland.



There is again the Colonial question. In the last war four years of unprecedented strain proved insufficient to rend asunder the bonds which link together the scattered populations living under the British flag. British command of the sea was here undoubtedly the decisive factor. What would happen, however, under the changed circumstances of to-day, should war again come, no one is able faintly to conjecture.

Happily for the people of these lands the same influences which have wrecked the isolationist dream have ensured that we shall not stand alone in the face of danger. If to-day it is no longer conceivable that we can escape being involved in our neighbours' quarrels, the converse is equally true. A war in which the British people was defending its national existence would be a war in which the very basis of human existence, the whole world economy, would be in the melting-pot. It follows as a consequence that other nations are as vitally interested in the preservation of peace as are we ourselves.

Out of a common peril has grown a common realisation that the defence of peace is not the affair of any one nation but of all peoples. It is a conception which is just as real a factor in its effect on the international situation as are submarines, and tanks, and aerial torpedoes. When, if ever, the new conception will have taken such a hold of the imagination of the peoples that, instinctively, they will rise to stop a war—in the words of the late Lord Grey—"as neighbours run to put out a fire", then the peace of the world will be secure. That point has not yet been reached. We are indeed a long way from it, but at least the seeds have been sown. When Italy invaded Abyssinia the votes of fifty-one nations condemned her.

We know to our cost that in every country there are those who strenuously oppose, if not always in theory, yet

frequently in practice, the conception of a common responsibility for the defence of peace. We need not expect to find France an exception. That section of British public opinion which sees most clearly the paramount importance of close international co-operation if peace is to be saved warmly welcomed the advent to power of a new Government after the elections which took place in France in May, 1936. It did so largely because it saw in the *Front Populaire* the antithesis of those forces, represented by M. Pierre Laval, which had stood in the way of effective joint action being taken in restraint of Italian aggression during the preceding months.

Since the new Government has been in office, public opinion, whatever misgivings it may have had regarding this and that feature of M. Blum's policy, has noted with real satisfaction the consistently friendly attitude of French policy towards this country, and indeed towards international co-operation in general.

There are not wanting, however, would-be prophets to assure us that the *Front Populaire* represents only a passing phase in French political life, and that deep down there exist influences which are sure sooner or later to disrupt it. In particular, it is asserted, the interests of the French peasantry are in sharp conflict with those of the industrial working-class, and amongst the former; if not the latter, there exists the probability of a movement developing which will wash its hands of any responsibility for the maintenance of peace, and, by destroying national unity, will render it impossible for a French Government to take decisive action to counter future acts of aggression.

Were it really the case that irreconcilable and fundamental antagonisms existed between the rural population and the urban proletariat, the situation would indeed be precarious. For it so happens that at the present time those

who work on the land are almost as numerous as those employed in industry. Two generations ago it was altogether otherwise. The village population was then greater than it is to-day; the urban population considerably smaller. There has, however, been a continuous drift into the towns, a drift which has taken place more recently in France than in Britain. Nevertheless the country population is still so numerous that were it to find itself as a whole in opposition to the towns France would be in the situation of being divided into two opposing camps of almost equal strength.

Since there is universal conscription in force, a situation would arise in which the loyalty of the army would be put to a severe test, for what was desired by the soldiers recruited from peasant families would be altogether different to what was being demanded by those coming from the working-class quarters of the industrial cities. Let it be said at once, however; it is scarcely conceivable that any such situation should arise, and for the good reason that though there may be points of conflict between the interests of the two most numerous classes in French society, there exist at the same time circumstances which compel them, each one in its own interest, to come together.

First and foremost of these circumstances is just their common interest in the preservation of peace. If anything the peasant is even more profoundly attached to the cause of peace than the worker. So long as he is able to judge for himself how this object can best be attained there is little danger that he will be found in a different camp from his brethren of the cities. The danger really arises when the matter is not left to his common sense, but is obscured by the intrusion of false considerations, to which the peasant, who in the nature of things is politically less developed than the townsman, may fall a prey.

An instance of such a clouding of the issues occurred during the development of the Abyssinian affair, when the greater part of the press in France adopted the line that insistence upon a solution of the conflict in accordance with the Covenant of the League of Nations would precipitate a European war. Considering that such an argument was advanced at a time when the military preparations of National-Socialist Germany were far from being complete, it may seem surprising that it should have carried weight, yet the fact remains that in the country districts it achieved wide currency.

Finding common ground in their hatred of war, peasant and worker are also brought together by the circumstance that they have certain economic interests which run parallel. Both, for instance, are interested that the cost of living, already high in France by comparison with other countries, should be kept within reasonable bounds. And this, precisely, is a question which it will tax the combined efforts of both to the uttermost to solve to their satisfaction. Although in this sphere also there is room for the development of divergent tendencies, the over-riding consideration must remain the paramount necessity for united action if anything at all is to be achieved. Again, if the workers are insistent that the State undertake the execution of a large-scale scheme of public works as a means of keeping industry going and relieving the pressure of unemployment, the peasants have their own reasons for advocating a similar policy. The adoption of a public-works programme presents itself to the rural mind in terms of a much-needed amelioration of conditions in the country districts. There are roads waiting to be built, electric mains to be extended, water-supplies to be provided, land-drainage and flood-protection works to be completed.

For a large part if not the whole of the peasantry the completion of the fabric of social services undertaken by the State is as burning a question as it is for the workers. The provision of adequate allowances to those with large families, and above all of old-age pensions, are reforms passionately desired by the poorer peasants, just as they are also by the proletariat in the towns.

Peasantry and proletariat have an equal interest in seeing to it that the system of taxation, which presses far more heavily in France on those with scanty incomes than does the British system, should be radically changed.

In all these directions, and there are others, the industrial workers and the agriculturists have interests which, if not identical, are nevertheless closely similar.

On the other hand there is the question of private property. The industrial worker who does not own property has no great interest in seeing that its rights are maintained. He is even, under the stress of economic privation, driven to challenge the existence of any right in property at all. Here he parts company abruptly with the peasant. To the latter the right to own property appears as the very foundation of existence. Either he is the owner of his land into which he has sunk his available energy and resources—his father and his grandfather before him. Or even if the land itself is not his, he is still the owner of his implements of labour, his ploughs and waggons, his flocks and herds and beasts of burden. Only to the extent to which the working-class is prepared to respect his property is the peasant willing to join hands with it for the prosecution of common aims. But once touch these sacred things and the peasant is no longer a friend but the bitterest of enemies.

The devotion of the peasant to the property which is his means of livelihood is well understood by those whose

interest it is to place him at all times in opposition to the proletariat in the towns. He is continuously being plied with the argument that the workers are in favour of nationalisation and socialisation of the means of production, and that therefore his land and capital are in danger of confiscation. Notwithstanding that no important working-class party has on its programme measures aiming at the confiscation of peasant property it would be idle to suppose that the argument carries no weight. On the contrary, seeing that working-class propaganda was tardy in making its appearance in the country districts, it would be surprising to learn that the contrary idea of working-class policy, as one aiming not only to defend peasant property rights, but in some measure to extend them, had as yet taken firm root.

The peasant question indeed abounds in complications and certainly is not one which lends itself to over-simplified generalisation. It is far more fruitful to study the various problems of peasant existence at close range. To enable the English reader to do so with a minimum expense of time and effort is the object of the present book. The hope may be expressed that it will fill a gap which has hitherto existed, for in recent times no comprehensive treatment of the subject has been attempted, covering at once the political problems and the economic causes which have given rise to them. In succeeding chapters the reader will have placed before him a survey of agricultural production as well as of the situation of the various classes which go to form French rural society. From these beginnings he will be led on to a consideration of the problems which are now confronting the peasantry, and of the efforts which have been, and are being, made to arrive at a solution.

Some thirty years ago an English writer advanced by way of justification for writing an account of his experiences during several years spent in the French countryside the opinion that "the great work of international writers in our time ought to be the work of making different nations understand each other better".<sup>1</sup>

If such a plea had cogency thirty years ago, how much more cogency must it have to-day, when we British can no longer afford the luxury of being insular, when close co-operation in defence of peace with the people of other lands has become for us a matter of life and death!

<sup>1</sup> *Around my House*. Studies of Rural France by P. G. Hamerton, London, 1908.

## CHAPTER I

### THE SOIL AND ITS PRODUCTS

THE GEOGRAPHER Onésime Reclus said of France that it was 'the *résumé* of the entire globe'. From the standpoint of his own subject the statement is not without a certain element of exaggeration, yet in a slightly difference sense, namely in designation of an area within which Man is confronted with nearly all his major problems of bending Nature to his own purpose, no sentence descriptive of the country could be more apt.

For, in the space of a few centuries, the people of France have evolved the technique by the aid of which forest and prairie, mountain-valley and hill-slope, swamp and scrub-land are best reclaimed and made to grow crops of utility to Man. They have mastered the means by which the most important of the domesticated animals can be made to multiply in numbers and improve in quality. They have worked out efficient means for extracting from the bowels of the earth its mineral resources. They have had wide experience of the varied problems of transportation by water and on land. Most of the known methods of power production and utilisation can be studied in France—the extraction of mineral oil is, however, a notable exception. Lastly, the processes by which raw materials of all kinds are turned into articles of human consumption and utility are, in all but the rarest instances, part and parcel of twentieth-century French economy.

Should there ever come a time when a united mankind seeks to establish a really comprehensive polytechnic in



some central place it is unlikely that the strong claims of France will be overlooked.

The basis of the all-round grasp of technique possessed by the French people lies largely, if not entirely, in the physical peculiarities of France itself. The very size of the country has something to do with it. Although small by comparison with some of the countries situated in other continents, in Europe, France, since the re-arrangement of territory at the close of the Great War restored the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, ranks in extent second only to the European territory of the U.S.S.R. The total land area is 550,986 square kilometres which is nearly double that of Great Britain and Ireland (311,504 square kilometres).

This considerable territory is situated midway between the North Pole and the Equator. Unlike the regions east of the Rhine it enjoys a temperature which is greatly modified by the Gulf Stream, as is that of the British Isles, and by the Mediterranean Sea. The rainfall over the whole area averages about 30·7 inches annually.

A complexity of factors contributes to a wide diversity of climate:

“It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that we have on our territory as many climates as there are soils but every region has so to say its own climate, which gives it, to quite as large an extent as its soil, its peculiar character. We enjoy three main types of climate: the Oceanic, warm and rather damp: the Mediterranean, hot and dry, and the Continental, cold and dry; but what a succession of secondary types! The climate of Flanders is oceanic like that of Aquitaine, but the sun does not warm Flanders and Aquitaine in the same degree, hence climates which are very different. The zones of overlapping of the main types constitute yet further variants which merge imperceptibly, the one

into the other. The Mediterranean sunshine transforms the vast deposits of alluvial silt in lower Languedoc into admirable soil for the vine. The silts of the North, thanks to a temperate climate, are specially suited to the beet-root and cereals. The marls of the lias carry the justly celebrated herbage of the Nivernais, a region with a mild and tolerably damp climate. The same marls in Lorraine, under a more rugged and drier climate, have by no means a similar adaptability for pastoral uses. The luxuriant greenness of the Caux country, situated on a broken tableland of chalk, which is naturally arid, owes its fertility and its pastures to the moisture-laden currents of air which bathe it during the greater part of the year."<sup>1</sup>

Consider also the factor of elevation. Although France does not comprise any areas lying actually below sea-level, there are considerable districts bordering the Atlantic and the Mediterranean which are only a few feet above that level.

On the other hand there are quite extensive regions of high altitude in the Alps and the Pyrenees where conditions are met with differing totally from anything met with in the British Isles or for that matter in most European countries.

Between these extremes there are the vast chalk areas of comparatively low elevation, the forested slopes of the Jura, the great extent of the "Massif Central", the latter both areas of predominantly high ground.

Geologically France is even more diverse in its structure than is Britain. Consequently there is an absence of all uniformity in the soil:

"The soil of France ranges from the thankless boulders of the Causses to the rich silts of Flanders, and from the meagre chalk plateaux of Champagne to the fertile

<sup>1</sup> P. Caziot, *Valeur de la Terre en France*, 1914, p. 79.

plains of Brie and Beauce, from Normandy's opulent pastures to the stony wastes of Languedoc and Provence. Limestone, silica, clay, humus, at times almost pure, but more usually associated in varying proportions, go to form soils of all characters and every quality. Whether they be transported, or merely decomposed on their original sites from underlying mineral strata, or alluvial deposits, these soils which vary so greatly, derive their peculiarities from differences in the rock formations from which they issue. In examining a geological map of France one cannot fail but be struck by the considerable number of geological formations which are found there. But what is even more striking is the discontinuity of these formations, and, apart from a few exceptions, the exiguousness of the area occupied by each."<sup>1</sup>

Such purely physical factors have contributed to the formation of the complex agricultural economy of modern France. It goes without saying that the human element has likewise been active. From the earliest times important trade-routes, linking the Mediterranean countries with Northern Europe, have traversed the country, bringing the inhabitants of France into contact with the habits and pursuits of other lands. Particularly was the long period of domination by Rome fruitful in introducing forms of human activity which were not entirely indigenous. In more recent times France disputed with Great Britain the claim to be considered the birthplace of the industrial revolution.

This combination of purely physical characteristics with the attributes of a virile human population has endowed France with her essentially varied agriculture. To understand how completely conditions may vary between one locality and another is to be on guard against any tendency towards over-generalisation. In fact, comprehension of the

<sup>1</sup> Caziot, *op. cit.*

agricultural position is quite impossible without attention being paid to the study of regional conditions, if not in all their detail, at least in their main outlines.

There have been many attempts to achieve a satisfactory regional classification on broad lines, not of course always from a strictly agricultural standpoint. For present purposes that adopted by Mr. Louis Michael in the monograph on France which forms part of the United States Department of Agriculture's series of surveys of agriculture in Europe (published in 1928) is possibly the most suitable. Mr. Michael distinguishes the following main regions:

- (1) The Alps and the Jura.
- (2) The Mediterranean coast.
- (3) The Rhône valley and Burgundy.
- (4) The "Massif Central".
- (5) The Basin of Aquitaine.
- (6) Brittany.
- (7) The Loire and Seine valleys and the North.
- (8) Alsace and Lorraine.

### *The Alps. The Jura.*

The mountainous south-west embraces all or part of some nine departments. It is a region of abundant rainfall due to the effect of the higher peaks of the Alps, which intercept the moisture-laden currents of air from the Atlantic. At these high altitudes the cold occasions continuous precipitation, and numerous streams, owing their origin to the mountain glaciers, become raging torrents in their middle and lower courses for a great part of the year.

In this region the inferior fertility of the soils, which are often of recent igneous origin, has to be set off against

the favourable circumstance of an exceptionally abundant rainfall, as has also the protracted period during which cultivators have to contend with frost. On a rough average some hundred days on which frost will occur have to be reckoned with. In the southern Alps the humidity is markedly less than it is further north, and the high ground traversed by the River Durance is consequently of little value agriculturally and in fact is mainly given over to the summer pasturing of sheep brought up from the Mediterranean area. Further to the north, however, there exist some truly fertile valleys, such as the Grésivaudan plain in which the important centre, Grenoble, is situated.

As for the Jura, although there are no very high peaks (the highest summit of the range—the Crêt de la Neige—is only some 5,600 feet above sea-level) a good deal of the area lies at tolerably high altitudes. These limestone ranges are well watered, and in consequence the Jura is not only rich in forests of beech and pine, but even more noted for its rich pasture. The region is one in which dairying exists side by side with an active small-scale industry, located in the towns to be found along the Doubs, Ain, Loue and their tributaries.

### *The Mediterranean Coastal Area.*

The seven departments—Pyrénées Orientales, Aude, Hérault, Gard, Bouches-du-Rhône, Var, and Alpes Maritimes—comprise, with the island department of Corsica, an area which is quite unlike the remainder of France.

In this area the rainfall, which is not heavy, occurs between autumn and spring. Winters are short and mild, with an average of only about thirty frosty nights. Seldom, moreover, are the frosts severe. During the long summers

the streams which at certain seasons of the year are rushing torrents, are all but dried up. Protected by mountain barriers, the Pyrenees to the south-west, the Cevennes to the north, and the Alps to the north-west, Mediterranean France is a region favourable to a great variety of crops, to the vine and olive, as well as to wheat, maize and other cereals. Irrigation works have been constructed on the Têt, Tech, and other rivers, thus making land available for the cultivation of spring greens. The area east of the Rhône is an extremely important centre for wine production. The wines of Carcassonne, Perpignan, Narbonne, Béziers, Montpellier are all in demand for the internal market. It is on the slopes of the Alpes Maritimes that the once-flourishing industry of flower-production for the Parisian perfumery trade is carried on.

The principal trading peoples of early times not only carried on an extensive trade with this part of France, but in the course of centuries founded, one after another, permanent colonies. It was from such settlements of Greek and Phœnician traders that many of the agricultural industries of present-day France took their origin.

The existence of Marseilles and Toulon, both important seaports, and of the series of fashionable seaside resorts extending as far as the Italian frontier, provides this region with its own market for the greater part of its agricultural production.

### *The Rhône Valley and Burgundy.*

Constricted between the "Massif Central" on the west and the Jura and the Alps on the east lies an important but narrow stretch of land formed by the valleys of the Rhône and of the Saône, which joins the former at Lyon. The Rhône-Saône corridor occupies considerable portions

of the Gard, Vaucluse, Ardèche, Drôme, Isère, Rhône, Saône-et-Loire, and Côte-d'Or departments.

South of Lyon there occur a succession of extremely fertile plains (Valence, Montélimar, Tricastin). To the north of the city the country is marshy, drainage being affected by the presence of the moraines of the Rhône glacier which filled the whole valley in the Ice Age. Further north, to the east of the Saône, an extremely rich country, la Bresse, extends from Bourg to Dôle. The soil here is a marl formed through the action of rivers, which in jurassic times flowed into an inland lake. Beet, wheat and maize are cultivated in la Bresse, which is likewise a region of pig and poultry raising.

Still further north, around the headwaters of the Saône and Loire, is the Auxois, formerly given over to vineyards, but these are now largely replaced by artificial pastures. The famous export wines of Burgundy are produced from the vineyards along the western escarpment of the Saône valley, from Dijon in the north almost to Lyon itself.

Not all of this area, however, produces crops of value. Regions such as the Chatillonnais, Montagne, and the Plateau de Langres, have stony, calcareous soils, and are mainly given over to the grazing of sheep.

Lyon owes its importance in large measure to its position at the junction of routes linking the Garonne valley with central Europe and the Paris region with the Mediterranean. Navigable inland waterways nowadays link the Saône with the Seine's tributaries, with the Moselle, and, by way of the Belfort gap, with the Rhine.

### *The "Massif Central".*

The centre of France is occupied by an elevated plateau covering an area as large as Scotland. The climate is

severe (some hundred frosts occur within the year) and the soils are generally of poor quality, though here and there rich pockets are met with. Although, generally speaking, the geological formations of the region are of very ancient origin, they are none the less extremely varied.

In the west, standing above the coastal plains of Aquitaine and the Vendée, is an extensive region of comparatively modest altitude, known as the Limousin and (northwards) La Marche. The sub-soils are non-porous, lying over schists, gneisses, and granites, such as are found in the Grampians. Rivers like the Corrèze, Vézère, Vienne flow at the bottom of deep gorges. Only in the west of the Limousin at low altitudes are rich pastures encountered. The Brive basin in this area is a noted fruit and vegetable growing region.

Further east the land rises. This is the volcanic region of the Auvergne with several conical mountains rising above the surrounding country to heights of five to six thousand feet above sea-level. There is much forest and upland grazings, and in many parts there are lakes. The occurrence of mineral springs has led to the development of such towns as Vichy and Royat as watering-places. The Limagne which lies north of the Auvergne has a rich alluvial soil.

Towards the south and east the Auvergne is continued by the Cevennes. All this area lies at an even higher average altitude, with high peaks such as the Vivarais, Gerbier de Jonc, and Lozère. While the lower slopes are terraced for the cultivation of the vine and olive and fruit, the high plateau only affords grazing for sheep. On this side too, the rivers, the Tarn, the Lot, Dourbie, and others flow through what are veritable cañons. Where the high limestone plateaux of the Causses give way to the schists and granites of Rouergue, Sidobre, and



other ranges, the soil is less porous. Pastures and light arable land on which barley can be grown provide a means of livelihood for the agricultural population which is lacking in the Causses.

*The Basin of Aquitaine.*

The south-west corner of France is agriculturally one of the richest. Lying between the Pyrenees on the south and the "Massif Central" on the west, the great plains watered by the Garonne and its tributaries, and further north by the Charente, receive a copious rainfall. There is no lack of sunshine.

The thirteen departments which comprise the area<sup>1</sup> account for some 15½ per cent of France's wheat production and 80 per cent of the maize. Indeed practically all the economic activity of the region is closely associated with the soil. The production of agricultural machinery and implements occupies an important place amongst the manufactures of Bordeaux and other towns. Apart from cereals, wine-growing is important. The limestone of the Bordelais produces Médoc, Graves, Sauterne, and other famous wines of quality. Cognac, metropolis of the best brandy in the world, is in the Charente valley. In past times the country between Bordeaux and the Spanish frontier was almost uninhabitable owing to the presence of malarial swamps, but this region of the "Landes" has now been extensively re-afforested with pine. The department of the Landes has by far the largest proportion of forest of all the departments of France (nearly one-and-a-half million acres). Unutilised land is to-day only 12 per

<sup>1</sup> Basses Pyrénées, Hautes Pyrénées, Ariège, Haute Garonne, Lot-et-Garonne, Dordogne, Landes, Gironde, Gers, Tarn-et-Garonne, Lot, Charente, and Charente-Inférieure.

cent of the whole area. Apart from timber the forests of the Landes produce resin and turpentine. In the Périgord area, which is dry and stony, there is much woodland and a plentiful crop of truffles which are the distinguishing characteristic of the local *pâtés*.

But above all it is the rich alluvial deposits of the Garonne and its tributaries which form the basis of the wealth of Aquitaine.

### *Brittany.*

While south-western France is essentially a country of the plough, the north-western region is one where animal husbandry predominates. Brittany has an equable climate in part due to the influence of the Gulf Stream. The prevailing winds which blow from the north-west in summer bring abundant rain. The winters are mild. Some thirty to forty frosts occur annually.

Two parallel ridges traverse Brittany from east to west. Between them the schistose soils of the Rennes and Châteaudun depressions are given over to the cultivation of wheat and other cereals, and still more to dairy-farming and horse-breeding. The Armorican coast, besides its deep sea fishing industry, has in more recent years been developed as a source for the supply of early vegetables for the Paris and English markets. Marine manures are much utilised. In some parts three crops of vegetables are obtained during the year from the same piece of land. Other parts of Brittany are less fertile, yielding only poor crops of barley or rye, or remaining a wild region of swamp and heath. The Vendée which continues south of Brittany to the Loire and beyond is very similar. The region is commonly divided into the *Bocage*, the *Plaine*, and the *Marais*. The soil of the first is granitic, or schistose,

and provides rich natural pastures. On the other hand the *Plaine* is limestone and put to arable uses. The *Marais* consists largely of land re-claimed, a sort of "little Holland", with dykes to keep out the sea. The dykes were frequently cut during the wars of religion and had to be rebuilt in the reign of Henri IV. This region of deep black earth is extremely productive, yielding exceptional barley crops, and providing the highest quality grazing on its salt-marshes.

*The Loire and Seine Valleys and the North.*

There is no very clear line of division between, on the one hand, the northern area which drains to the Channel or the Scheldt, and the Seine basin, or, on the other, between the country drained by the Seine, and that lying to its south-west, which is drained by the Loire. The rainfall varies between twenty-three and thirty-two inches as an average for the year. The climate is not particularly severe, though there occur some seventy frosts most winters.

With easy communications this part of France achieved economic and political unification (with Paris as its centre) in advance of the country as a whole by some considerable period of time.

To-day it is still the most important region from the agricultural point of view.

In the Loire valley, the Nivernais region is noted for its fat cattle. The sub-soil is jurassic, rich in phosphoric acid. Further down-stream on the left bank is the Sologne, a region covering over a million acres, non-porous and swampy, and still only partially reclaimed; the home of the chase, and in consequence a country where the claims of agriculture have to take second place. Most of the Loire

valley is productive of cereals, and wine-growing is also important.

Between Paris and the Loire are some of the best corn-lands of all France. La Beauce is an immense plain with no valleys. The sub-soil is a porous limestone over which a red silt of varying depth forms the cultivated layer. Further East the Brie country, in which clayish loam predominates, is almost equally rich. Normandy, lying between Paris and the Channel, is very varied. Amongst its most important agricultural districts are the Pays de Caux, a land of luscious meadows and cider-orchards, the Caen plain, which is limestone, the Bessin, where clay and limestone are mixed—another grazier's paradise—and the Cotentin peninsula where a schistose sub-soil has been improved through the ages by the continued use of marine fertilising agents. This also is a region of good grazing. In Southern Normandy there is a chalky region from which comes the famous Percheron breed of heavy draught horses.

East of Paris the fertile alluvial plains terminate abruptly at the chalk escarpment on which the famous wines of Champagne are grown. But Champagne is mainly a vast chalky plain, highly porous, and devoid of any deep covering of soil. It is largely given over to pasturing sheep. Only its eastern limits, "La Champagne Humide", where occur pockets of alluvial soil (Brienne, Perthois, etc.), are of much value agriculturally.

North of Champagne the chalk is covered with a layer of fertile loam. All this region of Picardy and Artois is important for the production of grain-crops and sugar-beet. Flanders and Hainault, along the Belgian frontier, are low-lying. In addition to the dense urban population, agriculture also absorbs large numbers, for the soil is generally rich, and has been energetically worked for

centuries. Amongst the products of this region figure horse-breeding, dairying, wheat, oats, barley, sugar-beet, tobacco, hops; to name but a few of them.

*Lorraine and Alsace.*

Lorraine is drained by the Meuse and the Moselle. In the higher parts to the south which border on the Vosges mountains, the surface, like that of the Vosges, is covered with forest and there are innumerable small lakes. Central Lorraine with its varied soils, marls, limestones, etc. is more important from an agricultural point of view. It is an area of mixed production, of hops, and fruit, and hemp, as well as of cereals and some vineyards.

The climate of Lorraine is the most typically "continental" to be found in France. The summers are short, the winters long and severe.

East of the Vosges the French frontier—once again since 1918—extends to the Rhine. Alsace, like Lorraine has a long winter of the 'continental' type, but, lying at a low elevation between the Vosges and the Black Forest, it enjoys warm, sunny, summers. The soil is generally alluvial, the rainfall is not as heavy as in Lorraine. The Haut-Rhin department is generally infertile, the land being marshy, studded with sheets of water. The Bas-Rhin, on the other hand, is extremely rich. On the limestone slopes there are extensive vineyards, while the alluvial plain is highly cultivated, yielding rich harvests of wheat, oats, barley, maize, tobacco, flax, hops and fruit.

In all, within its present boundaries, France, including the island of Corsica, extends to 55,098,556 hectares. This is almost exactly two-and-a-half times the area of Great Britain. Contrary to a rather widespread belief it is less

completely given over to agriculture than the surface of Great Britain. Some 18 per cent of the latter is not used, or practically not used, for agricultural purposes, whereas in the case of France the corresponding figure is around 36 per cent. The explanation lies in the existence of huge tracts of woods and forest, which in the aggregate cover 25 million acres.

UTILISATION OF THE SOIL<sup>1</sup>

	<i>Hectares</i>
Arable Land . . . . .	21,074,160
Permanent Grass for Hay . . . . .	5,551,860
"    " not for Hay . . . . .	1,837,810
Rough Grazings . . . . .	3,922,510
Vineyards . . . . .	1,617,280
Market Gardens . . . . .	371,290
Variously Cultivated . . . . .	497,290
Woods and Forests . . . . .	10,559,078
Heaths and Uncultivated . . . . .	5,460,420
Land not included in foregoing categories	4,206,858
Total .	55,098,556

Although France lies in such close geographical proximity to Great Britain, it must not be supposed that the agricultural products are invariably similar in the two countries. Indeed there are marked differences, and that not only in the relative importance attaching to the cultivation of the same crop here and there, but even more, owing to the fact that many extremely important products of the French soil are cultivated hardly, or not at all, on this side of the Channel. Not only have we no vineyards nor olive-groves, but flax and hemp, certain oleaginous plants, and flowers for perfume have no

<sup>1</sup> "Statistique Agricole Annuelle" of the Ministry of Agriculture for 1934.

established place in British agriculture. Tobacco, maize, and rye are in France much more important in the scale of products than is the case in Great Britain.

Of all agricultural products wheat is in France the most important. Almost exactly a quarter (5,404,170 hectares) of the total of arable land was sown to wheat in 1934. The other cereals—oats excepted—play a very subsidiary role as may be seen from the following table:

CEREAL HARVEST IN FRANCE IN 1934<sup>1</sup>

<i>Crop</i>	<i>Area Sown (Hectares)</i>	<i>Total Yield (Centals)</i>	<i>Yield per Hectare (Centals)</i>
Wheat . . .	5,414,120	92,129,060	17·05
Méteil (Wheat and Rye mixed)	74,400	982,420	13·20
Rye . . .	685,360	8,378,210	12·22
Barley . . .	732,490	10,340,730	14·11
Buckwheat . .	307,010	3,285,220	10·70
Oats . . .	3,322,400	43,844,110	13·20
Maize . . .	339,600	5,098,620	15·01
Millet . . .	13,240	106,370	8·03

Total .10,893,620 164,164,740

The harvest was above the average in this year, the wheat yield exceeding the average of the five-year period 1931-35 by some 15 per cent.

Most of the French wheats are of the "soft" varieties, to which millers sometimes take exception. Nevertheless, as the combined result of abundant harvests and the depth of the agricultural crisis in recent years, wheat imports, except from the French North African territories, have been practically excluded, and the French public has been consuming without protest bread baked from flour of entirely indigenous origin.

<sup>1</sup> *Statistique Agricole*, 1934.

The French are great consumers of bread. Only in Canada, Belgium, and Italy is the consumption per head higher than the French figure of 180 kilogrammes a year.

Formerly wheat did not occupy so predominant a place in human consumption as it does to-day.

"Secondary cereals formerly played a much more important part in human diet. . . . Barley, the staple of poor soils, of mountainous regions, shrinks from three million hectares at the beginning of the nineteenth century to less than 700,000 to-day; and is now to a greater extent than formerly fed to animals. Nevertheless barley bread, or bread of wheat and barley mixed, is still the basic food of the mountain folk in the Massif Central.

"*Méteil*, a mixed crop of wheat and rye, which in former times covered more than 800,000 hectares of indifferent land, has now practically disappeared.

"Corn-meal bread, '*mesture*', was till quite recently the staple nourishment of a part of the population of the south-west, especially of Béarn; it is still met with in the form of cakes or '*milhas*' and a milk porridge ('*gaudes*'). Until 1865 barley was used for making bread by the inhabitants of the Ile-de-Ré, and was a constituent of bread in Normandy.

"Over a long period a gruel of oats was consumed in Brittany, Ireland, Scotland, and certain parts of Germany. Buckwheat was more used in the west, especially in Brittany."<sup>1</sup>

At the present time wheat is therefore not only immensely important as an article of human consumption: its production is one of the main sources of livelihood of the French agricultural population. Protected by a series of legislative measures much more far-reaching than those

<sup>1</sup> René Dumont, *Misère ou Prospérité Paysanne?* Fustier, Paris, 1936, p. 24.



applied in Great Britain, a price is maintained within the country greatly in excess of that ruling on the world market. Yet extensive as is the actual area now being cultivated, it was greatly exceeded towards the close of the last century, when nearly seven million hectares were under wheat in a France which did not at the time include Alsace and Lorraine. The causes of the subsequent shrinkage in the area sown to wheat will be discussed at a later stage.

Wheat is of course put to other uses than the production of flour. M. Dumont, from whose interesting book quotation has already been made, gives the following figures for a total production of 89 million quintals yearly in the period 1902-1912, during which the average imports were round 2,600,000 quintals, and the total consumption, therefore, around 92 million quintals, which is the same as the actual 1934 crop:

Milled for flour . . .	78 to 80 million	centals
Seed . . . . .	8 to 9	„ „
Farinaceous products (Semolina, biscuits, etc.)	3 to 4	„ „
Loss in storage; fed to stock . . . . .	2	„ „(approx.)

Wheat is grown all over France. In the period 1909-1913 it was the major cereal crop in sixty-three of the then total of eighty-six departments. The yield, however, varies greatly in different parts of the country. In 1934 it was highest in the Nord department, where it averaged 33.60 quintals per hectare (54 bushels per acre). The departments in the Paris region showed high averages of 23-24 quintals per hectare, but at the other extreme were several departments in the Massif Central, the Alps, Pyrenees, and

Corsica, where the departmental average was only 10-11, or even lower.

The big milling enterprises, which account for some 30 per cent of the flour milled in France, are to be found in the neighbourhood of Paris, which, as has already been remarked, is one of the greatest centres of wheat production, as well as the principal market.

As is the case in our own country where only 17,000 acres are now sown to rye<sup>1</sup> instead of three times that figure ten years ago, rye has no longer its former importance in French agriculture. The decrease in area sown has been gradual but steady. It is cultivated principally on the poor soils of the Cevennes, Eastern Pyrenees, and Jura. The best yields in 1934 were obtained in the departments of the Nord (24 quintals to the hectare) and Vosges (22.03). The poorest yield was in the department of the Lozère, where the average of 21,010 hectares sown was only 7 quintals.

In no department of France is barley other than a secondary cereal crop. The most important centres of barley production are Normandy, Alsace and Lorraine, the Upper Loire, and the Eastern Cevennes. The yield per hectare in 1934 varied from 27.88 quintals in the Nord, where 5,700 hectares were sown to this crop, to as little as 7.68 in the Hérault. The total production in 1934 was about 1,200,000 tons as against 727,000 tons in England and Wales in the same year. As in England the barley crop of France is absorbed by the brewing-trade, or fed to livestock.

Oats is a far more important crop than barley. It accounted for 29 per cent of the total land under cereals in the period 1909-1913. In the north-eastern region it is, generally-speaking, hardly less important a crop than

<sup>1</sup> England and Wales.

wheat. In the Pas-de-Calais, for example, where in 1934 146,170 hectares were sown to the latter, 109,110 were under oats. The Nord was in 1934 the department with the highest yield per hectare (30 quintals).

Maize needs a warm sun to ripen its heavy ear. The production in England is negligible, and the same holds true for most of France. Only in the south-west is it a crop of real importance. Of the dozen departments in which an acreage in excess of 25,000 is sown to maize only the Saône-et-Loire is outside that area. In the Landes 40 per cent of the land under tillage is devoted to this crop. The total value of the French maize crop in 1934 was 412,780,000 francs (about £2,800,000 at current exchange). The small area under millet is found almost entirely in the Landes and along the Mediterranean coast.

Rather a smaller area (307,000 hectares in 1934) is sown to buckwheat than is sown to maize. In four departments of Brittany (Ille-et-Vilaine, Côtes-du-Nord, Finistère, and Morbihan) 50 per cent of the total production is concentrated.

Fifteen million quintals of grain of various kinds (including flour) were imported into France in 1934, and 5·6 million were exported (mostly de-natured wheat owing to an excess crop in the previous year). Since, in 1934, French grain production exceeded 164 million quintals, it will be observed that France is very nearly self-supporting in grainstuffs.

The situation as regards the production of cereals is thus totally different in France and in Great Britain. Whereas the former country produces almost enough grain for its needs, Great Britain, even to-day, after a series of protective measures have been taken, can only find a quarter of the wheat necessary to meet home

consumption.<sup>1</sup> And in addition large quantities of other grainstuffs have to be imported to feed livestock.

When we turn to the question of meat we find conditions more similar. Again France is practically self-supporting, but in recent years Great Britain has advanced far on the road to becoming so also, and in the matter of fresh milk is completely so.

Not only does France import little meat, either on the hoof, or slaughtered; she is to far less an extent than Great Britain an importer of feeding-stuffs. In 1934 against a British importation of 557,000 tons of cake and meal France procured from abroad only some 90,000 tons.

The following table gives the totals of the various kinds of livestock in the two countries according to the 1934 figures in both cases:

<i>Species</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	<i>France</i>
Cattle . .	6,660,000	15,704,480
Sheep . .	16,527,000	9,571,360
Pigs . .	159,000	7,043,880
Horses . .	886,000	2,837,750

This table indicates that France has roughly two-and-a-half times as many head of cattle as England and Wales. On the other hand there are almost twice as many sheep in this country as there are in France. The difference in the number of pigs is not very great, but there are more than three times as many horses for which food has to be provided in France as there are here.

The yearly consumption of meat of all kinds in France<sup>2</sup> is now about 45 kilos (roughly 100 lbs.) per head as

<sup>1</sup> According to *The Agricultural Dilemma* by Lord Astor and Mr. Rowntree, we have at a cost of over £7,000,000 in a single year only increased wheat production from 16 per cent, as it formerly was, to 24 per cent of consumption.

<sup>2</sup> Vide *Misère ou Prospérité Paysanne?* by R. Dumont, p. 67.

against about 56 kilos per head in Great Britain. But the proportion of beef, mutton, and pork consumed differs, and in France a good deal of horse-flesh enters into the diet of the less prosperous sections of the community.

From an examination of the foregoing table it is clear that beef and veal are by far the biggest factors in the French meat supply. This is particularly the case for the urban population. Contrariwise in the country districts pork is of great importance in the human diet.

In outlining the chief natural regions, some indication has already been given of where the livestock industry is mainly centred, but it would be true to say that cattle are raised to some extent almost everywhere. There are a large number of different breeds. In 1894 no less than 182 distinct strains and sub-strains were listed.

Michael<sup>1</sup> observes that "practically no cattle are raised for their meat alone. . . . In the latter part of the last century English cattle, especially Durhams, were introduced to modify the local breeds with a view to increasing meat yields, but no truly beef breed has yet been developed."

Best-known of French breeds of cattle are the *Normand* found in the valley of the Seine and its tributaries, the *Flamand* in the north-east, the *Breton* short-horn in the north-west, the *Limousin* in the central and the *Brown Swiss* in the south and south-west.

A large white animal known as the Charolais is bred in central France for work. The meat is sold cheap in the markets of the larger towns.

Cows in milk represent about 50 per cent of the total head of cattle, and it is noteworthy that veal is consumed in very large quantities in France, the calves are entirely milk-fed, and the meat is almost unsaleable as veal if there is the slightest red tinge.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Agricultural Survey of France, p. 122.

One hundred years ago there were nearly three times as many sheep in France as there are to-day. The decrease has been due in part to the competition of Australia, New Zealand, and other new countries in the wool-market, but also greatly to the more intensive cultivation of the soil in France in recent years.

There are many native breeds of sheep, amongst them the *Auvergnate*, *Marcheoise*, *Saintongeoise*, and *Limousine* of the Massif Central. There are also to-day imported breeds—Southdowns and Leicesters—and crosses. The *Rambouillet* is an adaptation of the Spanish merino. Apart from their wool and their mutton, French sheep are sometimes bred for their milk, which is consumed fresh in parts of the central plateau, or is made into cheese (Roquefort).

Whereas in the towns beef forms an overwhelming proportion of the meat consumed, this is not the case in the country areas. A butcher's shop is not so common a sight in a French village as it is even in the smallest villages in our own country. The French peasant does not consume enough meat to justify the frequent slaughtering of so large an animal as a bullock. Consequently he derives his modest supply of meat largely from killing his own pig, the neighbours assisting him to dispose of the meat. According to Michael, pigs are usually slaughtered in France at from six to eight months of age, when they range between 176 and 220 lbs. in weight, or at ten to twelve months; the weights at the later stage being between 331 and 441 lbs.

Considering the extent to which the horse has been superseded as a means of locomotion by the motor-car and the tractor, it is astonishing to note that there are still as many horses in France to-day as there were fifty years ago. Aged animals are generally sent to the slaughter-yard. In the poorer districts of the cities the vendor of

horse-flesh, with the three gilt horses' heads over the shop-entrance, is commonly to be seen. The fact that there is a market for the meat may be a contributory factor in the survival of the horse, but a more important factor is the backward state of France's technical equipment in agriculture, a subject which will be dealt with at length later on.

Nevertheless, if the total numbers of the species have remained constant during a long period, it is certain that there has been a marked alteration in the numbers in different categories. It is essentially the heavy draught farm animal which is being bred to-day. The most important breeds are the *Nivernais*, *Percheron*, *Boulonnais*, *Ardennais*, and that of the department of the Nord.

In 1934, there were 1,405,310 goats in France, of which 10 per cent were in the Island of Corsica.

The French livestock industry differs from our own to some extent, and differs a great deal more from that of countries like the Argentine and Australia, in that large-scale production is conspicuous by its absence:

"The outstanding characteristic of the whole livestock industry from producer to consumer is that it is composed of a large number of very small units. The great majority of the farms maintain at least two or three, though seldom more than a dozen, head of cattle. There are universally several sheep and a few hogs. In only a few of the departments in central and south-eastern France are there more swine than cattle on the farms, and horses are found only on the larger holdings.

"It should also be observed that the livestock industry is not specialised to any considerable degree, the animals in practically all cases being but one item in a general scheme of diversified farming. Moreover the animals themselves have not been developed primarily for meat production—cattle are raised chiefly for work and milk—sheep supply wool and milk as well as meat, and hogs are largely incidental to farm operations in general.

Animals are sold a few at a time as a convenient marketing opportunity presents itself, usually at a local fair, or on some periodic market day."

While the production of meat can be regarded as secondary in the general scheme of French farming, the position is altogether different as regards milk. It is his daily delivery of milk which enables the peasant to meet current expenses. Three-quarters of the total supply comes from small farms, and altogether there must be some three million independent producers in the country.

The total production of milk, exclusive of that left to the calves, is estimated to be about 120 million hectolitres (2,640 million gallons), which is just about double the quantity handled by the Milk Marketing Board in this country. In Great Britain the unit of production as regards milk is much larger than in France. Whereas here the average production per farming unit is about 22 gallons daily, in France it is probably somewhere in the neighbourhood of a tenth of that figure.

I am indebted to M. Bigorre, the young director of the Co-operative creamery at Auxerre, for a comparative table, showing how milk is disposed of in the two countries. M. Bigorre visited England in the beginning of 1936 in order to study at first-hand the working of the Milk Marketing Board, and has been good enough to allow me to use the report which he subsequently compiled. His estimate of the percentage consumption of milk is as follows:

<i>Consumed</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>	<i>France</i>
As fresh milk	.	73	39
„ butter	. .	12	42
„ cheese	. .	4	18
„ cream	. .	11	0
		<hr/>	<hr/>
		100	99



Although this is not perhaps evident at the first glance, the *per capita* consumption of fresh milk in the two countries is roughly the same, since the populations are roughly equal and the French figure of 39 per cent refers to a total production almost twice as abundant as that of England and Wales. It is certain, however, that the consumption is greatly restricted owing to the insufficient purchasing-power of large sections of the urban population. The consumption of fresh milk per head of population is at least twice as great in the United States as it is in either Great Britain or France.

The system of grading milk according to quality has not been introduced into France, but steps have been taken from time to time to maintain the quality. Thus a law of 1935 provided for the destruction of 150,000 animals "in bad general condition and deemed to be tuberculous".

With the development of rapid communications, it is now possible to send milk to the principal market, Paris, from points within a radius of at least sixty miles, but the bulk of the supply is brought from within a much more restricted zone.

Although M. Bigorre's figures suggest that there is no consumption of cream as such in France, it should be borne in mind that a large amount of the cheese produced is of the soft cream varieties, such as the "Petit Suisse". So far, however, there has been no appearance of the itinerant ice-cream vendor on the roads of France at all comparable with what we are accustomed to here.

A very large proportion of milk in France goes to the production of butter. Before the war, France, particularly Normandy, produced large quantities of butter for export to this country, where French butter topped the market.

Since the war the English market has been lost to countries which have gone in for standardisation, and most of the butter now produced in France is consumed at home. The price is much higher than in England and the consumption per head less than half what it is here. The lower consumption is in part explained by the custom of using oil in cooking in place of butter in Southern France, and lard and even goose fat in the poorer districts of the Massif Central.

With some exceptions, such as the veined cheese known as Roquefort, made from sheep's milk, and the big Gruyère cheeses, which are a speciality of the Jura, most of the favourite descriptions of cheese are no longer the product of a particular locality. I myself saw being made in a creamery in the Yonne department, a long way to the south of Paris, some ten different varieties, including cream cheeses. Amongst the varieties being produced at this factory were Brie (originally produced much nearer Paris to the east) and Coulommiers, Port-Salut, and Camembert, all of which last three used to be considered products of Normandy.

Cheese is a favourite article of diet in France, which ranks third after Holland and Switzerland in the amount of the *per capita* consumption.

In the whole country there are some 6,400 establishments dealing with the processing of milk. A very large proportion of these are to be found in the Alps and the Jura. As a by-product casein is now being produced in quantity, particularly in recent years when there has developed a growing demand for it from the munitions industry.

Farmyard animals, poultry, pigeons, rabbits, etc., form an important item in French agricultural production. There is no part of France in which poultry-raising is not carried on as a by-product of general farming.

HEAD OF POULTRY, ETC.<sup>1</sup>

"The following estimated totals may be given:

Fowls . . . . .	100,000,000
Geese . . . . .	6,000,000
Ducks . . . . .	6,000,000
Turkeys. . . . .	2,500,000
Pigeons . . . . .	7,000,000
Rabbits . . . . .	50,000,000

"The importance of this farmyard population is rather variable, depending on the economic situation of French agriculture; its value may be put at about 3,000,000,000 francs.

*"Importance of Farmyard Production.*

"There are no statistics which can directly supply us with a figure. It is, however, possible to assess this production at:

"480 million kilos deadweight of poultry, that is in assessing ducks, geese, etc., in proportion to their weight, the value of 240 million fowls would be 4,200,000,000 francs.

"240 million kilos dead-weight of rabbits, or 120 million live rabbits at 3,000,000,000 francs.

"Six to seven thousand million eggs valued at 2,600,000,000 francs.

"Giving the total value of this class of production as about 10,000,000,000 francs.

"Prices used in this calculation are middling on the Central Market of Paris.

"Naturally that portion of the livestock which serves for its own renewal is not included, nor stock lost through whatever cause it may be.

"Taking into account that prices at the point of production are about half those paid by the ultimate

<sup>1</sup> Compare British Ministry of Agriculture's return of poultry on agricultural holdings of England and Wales in 1934 (Fowls 61.3 million, Ducks 2.4 million, Geese 650,000, Turkeys 788,000).

consumer; taking into account also that about half the produce is consumed by the producer himself, we can estimate that the farmyard contributes to French agriculture an income which varies between  $2\frac{1}{2}$  and 3 milliards of francs annually.

*“Characteristics of Farmyard Production.*

“Farmyard production can be divided into two categories:

(a) “*Specialised Poultry-farming*, which accounts for about 5 per cent of the stock, and which is extremely intensified, and even industrialised;

(b) “*The Farmyard Proper* ; this embraces 95 per cent of the total head of stock, and is almost everywhere unspecialised.

“On the farm, the farmyard population is looked upon essentially as the means of transformation into food for human consumption of by-products, and of the refuse from grain production, and of certain natural products, vegetation, insects, etc.

“Expenditure is only incurred for immediate and well-defined ends, as for instance on fattening foods for the production of goose-liver, etc.

“The same holds true for rabbits.

“Production is thus essentially *seasonal*. It is mainly associated with small-scale farming.

“It would appear that the family-farm is the best adapted to the needs of farmyard production.”<sup>1</sup>

In times of agricultural depression there is a tendency for farmers rapidly to augment their poultry production, not only in order to save their butcher's bills, but because the sale of poultry is at such times more remunerative than grain. Rather than dispose of the latter at a heavy loss it pays to fatten birds on it, and thus indirectly to

<sup>1</sup> *Notes Economiques sur la Basse-Cour*, by M. Bouthillon, published in the Proceedings of the Permanent Assembly of Chambers of Commerce, 1935-1936.

snatch a modicum of profit. M. Bouthillon estimates that the recent crisis has occasioned an increase of 20 per cent in poultry production.

Agricultural production in France is of such a nature that despite the importance of the livestock industry, there is actually little need to depend on imported feeding-stuffs.

Apart from natural and artificial pasture-land, straw is perhaps the most widely used food. Quantities harvested in 1934 were as follows:

#### STRAW YIELD IN FRANCE IN 1934

*(In millions of quintals)*

Wheat . . .	133·00
Mixed Corn . . .	1·75
Rye . . .	16·80
Barley . . .	12·50
Buckwheat . . .	3·20
Oats . . .	60·70

227·95 equivalent to

22½ million tons.

There is also available for forage the tops of certain root crops (turnips and swedes, beet and jerusalem artichokes). Cabbage as a fodder crop was grown on 239,080 hectares in 1934 (ten times the area sown in England and Wales). Clover covered 1,237,220 hectares, lucerne 1,182,620, sainfoin 551,320. Almost an exactly similar area was sown to temporary grasses, and 715,580 hectares were under green catch crops.

Of root crops the potato holds pride of place in French farming. Although grown to some extent everywhere the area of heaviest production is Brittany, where in four departments there were, in 1934, some 375,000 acres under this crop, equivalent to 75 per cent of the total

area devoted to potatoes in the whole of England and Wales.

In all France in 1934 the area under potatoes was about three and a half million acres and the total production 166,531,080 quintals.

“Although the area sown was less by about 100,000 hectares in 1924–33 in comparison with 1904–13, average production increased during the same period by about 15 million quintals (148 as against 133). In recent years, allowing for climatic variation, increasing yields are more and more common in regions of careful farming, thanks to better manuring of the land and still more the use of new varieties, of seed free from disease, of types which combine early maturity with quality and high productivity (such as *Dikke Muizen*). This makes up for damage caused by *doryphora*. During the period 1931–35 the average harvest was 156 million quintals, although the area sown continued to decrease. If the quantity retained for seed is taken as 25 million quintals, the remainder (according to the General Confederation of Potato Growers) in an average year is disposed of as follows:

68 to 70 million quintals for human consumption;  
52 to 55 millions fed to livestock;  
5 millions for meal.”<sup>1</sup>

In a report by MM. d’Hespal and du Frétag to the Permanent Assembly of Presidents of Chambers of Agriculture in 1936, the percentage of the crop absorbed by the industrial market, i.e. for the production of meal, starch, industrial alcohol, and glucose (the last very little), is put at a much lower figure—about 2 per cent of the total. This is largely owing to a sharp drop in recent years in the production of meal.

Amongst other root-crops of importance in France beet

<sup>1</sup> R. Dumont, op. cit., p. 86.

covers some two million acres, turnips and swedes rather more than half a million, and the jerusalem artichoke 330,000 acres; its tall dark stem and yellow flower are a conspicuous feature of the landscape in central and southern France.

In many parts of France soil and climate are alike favourable for the production of early vegetables. This is particularly the case in Brittany, which supplies the London market as well as Paris, and also naturally enough in the fertile regions of the south and south-west, especially in the irrigated districts around the foot of the Cevennes, the production of early vegetables for the Paris market has, with improved means of transport, increased very considerably.

“Early vegetables which formerly came, in small quantities and by the expensive processes of ‘forcing’, from the market gardeners round Paris, to-day, thanks to increasing facilities of transport, come from regions with mild winters. As the railways were extended, first the country near Lyon, then the Vaucluse, and Brittany, and eventually Hyères and Rousillon took to supplying Paris and the big centres.”<sup>1</sup>

The total area devoted to the cultivation of fresh vegetables has increased at a rapid rate and the tendency would appear for it to continue to do so. Between 1904 and 1933 some 150,000 additional hectares have been diverted to this form of production. Of the total acreage of approximately a million and a quarter under vegetables in 1934 some 60 per cent is accounted for by market-garden cultivation, the rest mainly by vegetables grown by the non-specialising farmer. From both types of cultivation the combined production in 1934 of various vegetables for the table was as follows:

<sup>1</sup> R. Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

## PRODUCTION OF FRESH VEGETABLES IN 1934

*(In 000's of quintals.)*

Artichokes	.	.	.	.	.	803
Asparagus	.	.	.	.	.	371
Cabbage	.	.	.	.	.	770
Carrots	.	.	.	.	.	1,924
Cress	.	.	.	.	.	86
Garlic	.	.	.	.	.	153
Gherkins	.	.	.	.	.	47
Mushrooms (including uncultivated)	.	.	.	.	.	172
Onions	.	.	.	.	.	1,295
Pumpkins	.	.	.	.	.	988
Shallots	.	.	.	.	.	89
Tomatoes	.	.	.	.	.	1,505

The production of dried vegetables is more extensive in France than in this country. As against a total of less than 300,000 acres sown annually to beans and peas in England and Wales, France had in 1934 some quarter of a million acres under kidney beans, and another 97,000 acres under broad beans, and a further 75,000 under the horse-bean. A crop of 68,050 quintals of lentils was harvested from the 6,380 hectares under cultivation, and 262,030 quintals of dried peas from 19,880 hectares. A generation or two ago the production of dried vegetables was considerably higher. In 1882 the area under lentils was over 14,000 hectares. The production of dried peas in the same year was as high as 871,000 quintals.

The great variety of the French climate accounts for the wider choice of home-grown fruit available to the French consumer as compared with ourselves. The following table, showing the production of orchard and small fruit in 1934, well illustrates the variety as well as the scale of the production of fresh fruit. The production of grapes



for the table is not included. This alone averaged 127,000 tons in the period 1927-1934, equivalent to a *per capita* consumption of about 7 lbs. a year for the whole population.

FRUIT PRODUCTION IN 1934  
(In 000's of quintals)

Apricots . . . . .	232
Cherries . . . . .	879
Chestnuts . . . . .	1,829
Walnuts . . . . .	526
Peaches . . . . .	840
Apples and Pears (exclusive of cider-fruit)	3,250
Plums . . . . .	945
Prunes (before drying) . . . . .	68
Almonds . . . . .	134
Lemons, etc. . . . .	8
Strawberries . . . . .	184
Raspberries . . . . .	9
Gooseberries . . . . .	32
Mandarines . . . . .	2
Oranges . . . . .	9

This considerable production is nowadays almost entirely absorbed by the home market, for unlike her neighbours, Spain and Italy, France no longer ships fruit in quantity for the London market. Indeed her exports of fruit in recent years have seldom exceeded 10 per cent of total production.

On the other hand importation of fruit, chiefly exotic varieties such as bananas, and pineapples, which are not produced at home at all, or citrous fruits of which the home production is small, has increased very rapidly, even during years of crisis. It is evident that France, like Britain, is to-day accepting the familiar invitation to "Eat more fruit!" This being so, it is not unlikely that the near future will witness much more attention being

paid to fruit-growing than has been the case in the past.

Several varieties of fruit in France are used for the fabrication of alcoholic beverages. Cider and perry are the most important. In Normandy and some other parts of the country, cider takes the place of wine or beer as the case may be as the liquor of general consumption. Cider-orchards are concentrated in some twenty departments mostly lying in Normandy and Brittany and the country immediately to the south.

The product of these orchards is not, however, exclusively devoted to the production of cider and perry. On an average six million quintals of apples and pears are used in the distillation of industrial alcohol, while half that quantity finds its way to the distilleries which produce *eau-de-vie* for human consumption.

Thus the manufacture of cider accounts only for about three-quarters of the total crop of cider-apples and cider-pears. In the main cider has remained a product of the farm rather than of the factory. The reason is not far to seek:

“The manufacture of cider on the farm appears to be a necessity, as something which cannot be done away with even were it no longer manufactured for sale.

“The farmer is obliged, in order to satisfy the requirements of his workpeople, to lay in a stock of small cider—and a large stock at that—when one considers that it is by no means rare to find labourers who consume two gallons and more daily. Now this custom of being able to drink one’s fill which is so deep-rooted in the habits of the locality and which it is difficult to modify, in order not to become burdensome requires that the farmer makes the cider himself, and that it costs as little as possible. In other words there is no alternative but to make it on the spot.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean Geslin, *Report for International Exhibition at Turin.*

And so from September until late in November and even early December, when the best quality is made, the harvesting of cider-apples, and the fermentation of the crop, goes on busily all over Normandy and the other cider-growing districts.

Writing in 1912 M. Geslin, a leading authority in agricultural matters, put current value of vine-products in France at 1,354 million francs (£54,000,000 in pre-war gold francs) out of the total value of 11,278 million francs of agricultural production at that time. This means that in pre-war days her vineyards contributed some 11-12 per cent of the value of France's agricultural production. In all probability in an average year they still do so. It is for this reason, its capacity to produce revenue, that viniculture occupies so important a place in French agricultural economy, rather than for the nutritive qualities of the grapes alone. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude, as might be done in England where there are no vineyards, that wine is wholly an article of luxury. In the greater part of France it is as integral a part of normal human consumption as is beer or even tea in England.

Broadly speaking, wine production in France falls into two categories: *vins de marque*, which are quite definitely luxuries, and *vin ordinaire* which is regarded as a necessity even by the poorest. But in addition to wine, the juice of the grape furnishes other products. Distilled it appears on the market as brandy. Vermouth is also a product of the grape; so is vinegar. It is a constituent of certain liqueurs and *aperitifs*, and medicinal wines, and in seasons of abundance a certain quantity is converted into methylated spirit. Attempts are now being made in France to popularise the consumption of unfermented grape-juice, a drink which has already a wide vogue in America, while

certain varieties of grape are specially grown for dessert and for drying off as raisins.

The vine has been cultivated in France from very early days. It was well established in Roman times. Later, new varieties were brought back from the Crusades, spreading from the Pyrenees to other parts. In 1875 there were over 2,400,000 hectares of vineyards in the country. There are now only 1,600,000, many vineyards having been abandoned as a result of the succession of diseases and pests from which they suffered in the second half of the nineteenth century, of which *phylloxera* caused the greatest havoc. Indeed at one time *phylloxera* threatened to bring wine-growing well-nigh to a standstill. The situation was saved by the adoption of the practice of grafting on to American imported stock which renders the native vine virtually immune to this dreaded disease. The resistance of American vines to *phylloxera* was pointed out by M. Laliman at the Beaune Congress of Wine-growers in 1869, but it was left to M. Gaston Bazille two years later to be the first to advocate their introduction into France for grafting-stock.

The vine is usually grown on chalky or limestone soils on the slopes of hills, or on the edge of a plateau. The rows are about one yard apart.

An enormous amount of labour is required for wine-growing; some authorities estimate that it needs twenty times as much labour as the growing of cereals. According to M. de Lapparent, the cost per hectare at the beginning of the century on certain vineyards in the Bordeaux region was 1,202 francs yearly, of which wages represented 667 francs.

Writing of wine-growing in Champagne, Mr. Hedges Butler<sup>1</sup> observes:

<sup>1</sup> *Wine and Wine Lands of the World*, Fisher Unwin.

"The work starts in February with the pruning of the old wood: this is generally done by women. The branches that bore the previous year's grapes are all cut off except one and that is shortened; then the plant is buried, the shortened branch alone protruding from the soil. Wooden props are put in to support the new shoots, which are tied to them with straw and finally cut down to a height of about three feet. Growth is assisted by light hoeing. These various operations are complicated by constant warfare against insidious enemies. The two pests known as oidium and mildew are kept in check by powdering and spraying."

The wine is made when the grape has attained its richest saccharine content and weighs heaviest. This is usually late in September or even in October. In the autumn of last year, which was a disastrous one for the vine, I witnessed the first day of the vintage in a commune in the Cher valley in Touraine, which fell as late as October 19th and even then expert opinion in some cases regarded the date selected as premature.

Certain districts have long been renowned for the production of wines of superior quality, and the produce of these is now legally protected from competition. This became necessary in order to prevent wine of other districts being passed off as originating from the protected areas.

The most northerly of the celebrated wine regions is Champagne. Curiously enough champagne is made largely from black grapes, the skins being removed before fermentation. The well-known brands are all blends of wines from a number of different districts in the Champagne country. The sparkling quality is obtained by putting the newly-made wine through the process known as the "second fermentation" in the spring when it is first bottled.

The red and white still wines of Burgundy are grown on the slopes of a chain of hills on the west bank of the Saône, stretching for about forty miles between Chagny and Dijon. Some of the famous Burgundy vintages rank amongst the most expensive wines in the world.

Claret originates from the country round Bordeaux. The most important district here is Médoc, lying south of the town. Proceeding up to the Garonne River two other famous wine districts are reached—Graves and Sauterne, both famous for their white wines. St. Emilion is in the valley of the Dordogne, near its junction with the Garonne.

Besides the three main districts producing wines of superior quality there are others almost equally esteemed in France, if not so much abroad. Such are Saumur, which produces a sweet white wine, and is situated on the middle Loire, and Vouvray on the outskirts of Tours where a sparkling white wine is made.

But in extent these famous vineyards form only a tiny fraction of the whole area under the vine, notwithstanding that their produce represents a goodly proportion of the total revenue of the wine industry. Out of the ninety departments, only twenty-two returned less than 1,000 growers making the statutory declaration in 1934. In that year the total numbers of growers was 1,657,190, and the total value of the vintage amounting to 78 million hectolitres was 6,110,000,000 francs.

Wine commonly consumed in the country is of three kinds; red wine, made from black grapes, the skins being left with the juice during the whole period of fermentation, *rosé*, the pink colour of which is obtained by leaving the dark skins in the juice during the first part of the fermentation process, and white wine, which is made

indiscriminately from white or black grapes, but by removing all skins before fermentation begins.

Brandy first began to be distilled about 1630. The best qualities come from the neighbourhood of Cognac in the Charente valley. The various districts, the Grande and Petite Champagne and the Marais have their products jealously protected by legal enactments, which forbid other brandies to be sold under their territorial names. The Marais was about the only wine-growing district which escaped the ravages of *phylloxera* in the eighteenth-seventies, owing its immunity to the fact that the roots of the vine in this low-lying country are submerged by the winter floods.

Marseilles is the centre for the production of wine treated by the complicated process which yields vermouth.

Agricultural products which are not sold direct to the consumer but to the manufacturer, who uses them as the raw material for his industry, are commonly called "industrial" crops. In France undoubtedly the most important of them is sugar-beet. Others are hops, barley (to a great extent), tobacco, silk, wool, flax, hemp, rape, and olives.

Barley and wool have previously been mentioned. The manufacture of sugar from beet may be said to have originated in France. Following the researches of a German scientist Margraff in 1747 experimental factories began to be set up, but it was Pitt's "Continental Blockade", which cut off France and the European countries under Napoleon's domination from access to the area of cane-sugar production overseas, that really set the industry going. In 1806 Napoleon's Government offered the first bounty on beet. The growth of beet-sugar production was thereafter extremely rapid, and by 1883 France was exporting considerable quantities from her total production

of 406,000 tons. M. Dumont<sup>1</sup> gives the following table of average production and consumption of sugar in France for the ten-year periods ending with the years shown in column 1:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area under Beet Cultivation</i> (ooo's of hectares)	<i>Production</i> (ooo's of tons)	<i>Consumption</i> (ooo's of tons)
1883	220	406	358
1893	230	466	391
1903	275	790	526
1913	237	700	700
1923	102	300	768
1933	250	780	950

The sharp drop in production from over a million tons in 1901 was due to the operation of the Brussels International Convention (1902). At this Conference British and other colonial cane-sugar producers were able to make their weight sufficiently felt through the action of the British Government to impose on continental governments, including the French, the obligation to discontinue bounties in future on either the production or export of sugar.

Since the war, however, conditions have changed. The world demand for sugar has increased enormously and with it production; French production with the rest. Of recent years the industry has been assisted by the virtual prohibition of imports of sugar other than from the French overseas possessions. At the same time heavy purchases of sugar-beets on Government account for the distillation of power alcohol have also served to maintain a price which enables production to be maintained at a high level.

<sup>1</sup> op. cit., p. 52.



In 1934 the total area under sugar-beet was:

286,300 hectares producing 87,895,010 quintals for the refineries;

50,190 hectares producing 15,578,300 quintals for the distilleries.

Of the one hundred and eleven refineries and sugar factories all but six are situated in the area between Paris and the Belgian frontier. Distillation of alcohol from sugar-beet is carried on mainly in the five departments of the North-East.

France produces over double the quantity of beet-sugar produced in England and Wales.

According to M. Steib, President of the Chamber of Agriculture of the Haut-Rhin, about 50 per cent of the barley crop is malted for beer. As in this country the manufacture of beer, formerly brewed on the farm, is now exclusively an industrial operation. The principal brewery centres are in Alsace and at towns like Tantonville and Maxeville near Nancy in Lorraine. Other centres include Paris and its environs, Arras, Lille, Amiens and Rouen.

Hops, which give beer its aroma and assist in its preservation, are grown in the regions adjacent to the large centres of the brewing industry, and to a lesser extent elsewhere. The best quality is produced in the Côte d'Or department in Burgundy where some 400 acres are under cultivation. In 1934 the total production (three-quarters of which came from Alsace) was 27,000 quintals, but in the following year there was a glut, with a consequent fall of from 20-40 per cent in the price.

The total area under hops in the whole of France was about 5,000 acres as compared with 18,000 in England, and 10,000 in Kent alone.

There is land in many parts of France suitable for the cultivation of tobacco. That it is not more widely grown is due to the State monopoly, which rigidly controls its production, for which a special licence has to be obtained. The number of licences is about 50,000. The principal areas of cultivation are in Alsace, the Lot and Lot-et-Garonne, the Gironde, and Dauphiné. The value of the 1934 crop was 284 million francs (about £2,000,000 at current exchange).

In former years France was a large producer of both flax and hemp. The former needs rich, well-worked land and a certain degree of moisture. In 1934 only 23,000 hectares were sown to flax as against 105,000 in 1860. The principal areas of production are Brittany, the lower Seine valley, and the North. The best quality comes from the last-named district. Similarly fifty years ago there were some 180,000 hectares of hemp, whereas in 1934 less than 3,000 remained, of which two-thirds were in the department of the Sarthe. The fall in production is partly due to the high cost of retting the fibres, partly to foreign competition, and most of all to the substitution for home-made linen of cotton manufactures and for hemp of sisal.

Both flax and hemp are of value for their oil-bearing seeds as well as their fibres. Before the war France was the leading oil-and-cake producing country of the world. The mills were supplied not only from imported raw materials but also from the home production of flax, hemp, and beech seeds (the last-named from the Limousin, Auvergne, and Vosges) as well as rape, colza, and poppy. These last three cultures, like flax and hemp, have been diminishing in importance rapidly. In 1934 10,750 hectares were under colza, 3,050 under poppy, and only 2,760 under rape. Poppy seeds, besides yielding oil, are used as filling in certain sweetened bread or coffee cakes.

The olive is grown solely along the Mediterranean coast. With the low prices obtainable for olives of recent years many trees have gone out of cultivation.

Silk-production is again among the decaying rural industries of France, as may be seen from the following table:

	<i>No. of Producers</i>	<i>Quantity of Eggs incubated (in packets of 25 grammes)</i>	<i>Production of Cocoons (in Kilos)</i>
1913	. 90,517	126,678	4,423,046
1930	. 35,670	39,041	1,827,366
1933	. 15,894	18,658	942,972

Production is mainly carried on in the lower Rhône valley and eastwards along the coast. In 1934 the total production of mulberry leaves on which cocoons are fed was just over half a million quintals.

Apiculture yielded, in 1934, 13,570 quintals of wax and 87,610 quintals of honey.

The last product of French agriculture deserving separate mention comes only partially within such a description. It is the truffle. Gathered in country where the oak is common, and in particular on the south-western slopes of the Massif Central, the production in 1934 was 3,430 quintals, valued at over 12 million francs.

## CHAPTER II

### PRODUCERS (AND NON-PRODUCERS)

IN ITS INTERNAL structure French rural society differs in many important respects from our own. It is important also to remember that a far greater proportion of the total population is domiciled in the country than is the case here, where four-fifths of the people are town-dwellers. According to M. Bigorre the rural population in France is still 41 per cent of the total, despite an uninterrupted flight from the land which has been in progress for several generations. The parliamentary representation of this section is doubtless greater in the last analysis than with us. Its outlook is carried into the armed forces (probably half the conscripts in the army come from the countryside) and into the various branches of the civil administration, and undoubtedly counts for a great deal in either case.

The attitude of the peasantry has been beyond question a decisive factor in the recurring periods of political crisis through which France has passed in the last century and a half. There is no reason to suppose that the position has radically altered to-day.

It follows therefore that a knowledge of the various elements which go to compose the large rural population is indispensable to a serious study of French politics at the present time.

Assuming M. Bigorre's estimate to be correct the country population now numbers about 16½ millions. This includes women and children, and aged people not at work, as

well as those engaged in various occupations. Amongst the number are landowners, *rentiers*, members of the liberal professions, transport workers; others engaged in petty commerce, as well as a certain proportion of industrial workers. The total number of people actively engaged in agriculture recorded by the 1931 census was 7,580,000. Since this is nearly a half of the entire non-urban population the figure bears eloquent testimony to the fact that agricultural production engages the services not only of the menfolk, but to a quite extraordinary degree of women and children as well.

The term 'peasant', though it can be, and often is, used in the broad sense of 'countryman' as opposed to 'townsman', is more generally reserved for the purpose of distinguishing from all others those who are actually—whether as owners or as tenants—cultivating a portion of the land. The number of these, it is unnecessary to emphasise, is far less than the total number of persons domiciled in the country: nor does it represent more than a fraction, although a big fraction, of the numbers actually engaged in agriculture.

To understand the present position in regard to the ownership and occupancy of land and the existence of a landless proletariat in the countryside it is necessary to examine the historical processes which have taken place in France during the centuries which separate our era from the Middle Ages.

The feudal process, which had converted the majority of the country population into serfs or villeins, and the greater part of the arable land into 'demesne' appertaining to the lord of the manor, reached its farthest development in France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. From that time onward a reverse process set in: instead of continuing to farm their now unwieldy demesnes on

*latifundia* methods, many seigneurs began to divide them up into separate copyholds, enfranchising their villeins and converting them into copyholders. The new copyholders were still required to render a good many personal services to their lords, and paid a rental (generally in kind) for their copyholds. But once that was done they were permitted to enjoy the usufruct of the land. An industrious peasant could reap the reward of his industry in a way that was impossible under the system of collective tillage of a lord's demesne.

With the growth of trade which was taking place concurrently it became possible for the thriftiest and most fortunate of the copyholders by selling their produce to acquire sufficient wealth to buy out others. A new process of differentiation set in in the villages, resulting in a small minority of the cultivators waxing rich, and being able to farm comparatively large areas, while others lost all or most of their lands and were glad to work for a wage on the farms of their more fortunate brethren. Indeed the comparison drawn by Eileen Power between conditions in the latter part of the Middle Ages and Russia on the eve of its revolution is singularly apt: "While the Kulak was as familiar in the mediæval as in the modern Russian village, the other side of the process was the formation of a rural proletariat, which was already making its appearance by the end of the Middle Ages."<sup>1</sup> As is generally known serfdom or villeinage was only finally abolished in Russia in the nineteenth century. In both Western Europe, centuries ago, and in the Russia of yesterday, its disappearance led to the appearance on the scene of the capitalist farmer and of his counterpart the landless farm-labourer.

It must not, however, be assumed that villeinage disappeared rapidly in France. It was still extremely common

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Mediæval History*, Volume VII, p. 732.

as late as the fifteenth century, though then it is possible that the majority of the serfs in France had become enfranchised. Moreover, as was to be expected, the status of copyholders had repercussions on the conditions of the villein or serf. The existence of copyhold tenure, in which the rights of the lord of the manor were on the whole well-defined, set a limit to the arbitrary extortion of ever heavier service from the remaining unenfranchised villeins. If conditions became too bad they were sometimes able to escape and possibly to acquire land on copyhold tenure elsewhere.

Copyhold tenure might be described as limited enfranchisement, for the copyholder was still bound in many ways to the service of his lord. Although no longer at his continuous beck and call, he was still required to perform the *corvée seigneuriale*; in other words to work for so many days of the year on the demesne. He was bound to take his corn to the manorial mill, to have his cow served by the manorial bull, and in each case to pay the customary dues. Most lords of the manor exercised the right to levy tolls for the use of roads which they kept up. The *droit de colombier* gave them the right to keep an unlimited number of pigeons which fattened on the copyholders' corn. All game was rigidly reserved for the seigneurs.

Nor were the feudal lords always careful to keep even within their very generous rights. For one reason or another they were constantly tending to encroach on the rights of the copyholders and to levy dues in excess of those which had become established. In the latter Middle Ages there were many peasant risings.

The first on a big scale that occurred in France was in 1358. Under the leadership of Guillaume Cale, the peasants of the Beauvaisis rose against the feudal lords whose wars with the English caused them to be continuously coming

to their copyholders to replenish 'the sinews of war'. The movement quickly spread to Picardy and the north of the Ile-de-France, but it was eventually suppressed with great severity. From the peasant blouse called *jacques*, worn by the insurgents on this occasion the name *jacquerie* has come to be applied to peasant revolts in general.

These parallel processes, on the one hand the breaking up of the manorial demesnes into individual copyholds, and on the other the differentiation of a part of the copyholders into capitalist farmers and landless labourers continued right up to the French Revolution of 1789. On the eve of the Revolution the position, in the words of the *Cambridge Modern History*, was that:

"Four-fifths of the nation, fully twenty million souls, were employed in tilling the earth. An agricultural middle-class hardly existed save in these north-eastern provinces, Normandy, Picardy, Artois, Flanders and Ile-de-France, where proprietors were accustomed to let their land in large farms. Elsewhere nearly all the agricultural population were peasants. There the peasants vastly outnumbered all the other classes of French society put together. The condition of the peasants was undoubtedly a prime cause of the Revolution; but since it varied in different parts of France and as information is imperfect, it has been very differently represented by different writers according to the regions which they knew best, their temperament, or the political opinions which they cherished.

"The bulk of the French peasantry had achieved personal freedom. Villeinage had been declining in France ever since the twelfth century; and the number of persons more or less unfree in their personal status at the accession of Louis XVI did not exceed fifteen hundred thousand. These were mostly crowded together in a few districts. Louis emancipated the last serfs on the



royal domain, and might well have enforced a genuine emancipation, but serfdom was so exceptional. . . . In the administration of their communes the peasants had also been freed from the control or supervision of their lords. That their independence was little more than a matter of form was due to the interference of the intendant,<sup>1</sup> not of the gentry, who had been so carefully divested of administrative power.

"The French peasants had also acquired an immense interest in the land. . . . A recent writer of authority has accepted the opinion that before the Revolution one-fifth of the soil belonged to the Crown or was communal property, one-fifth belonged to the clergy, one-fifth to the nobles, and two-fifths to the Third Estate. As few of the middle class were landowners, the share of the Third Estate belonged mostly to the peasants, for the peasants who made up most of the rural community must be regarded as holding nearly all the communal lands. It appears that the peasants were always buying land and so changing the proportion in their favour. All the testimonies point to an enormous number of petty properties in France under Louis XVI. Arthur Young states that they abounded in almost every part of France and supposes more than one third of the kingdom to have been occupied by them. The lands still held by the Crown, the clergy, and the nobles were in some Provinces often let in farms of considerable size, but in most to peasant *métayers*."<sup>2</sup>

The net effect of the Revolution in so far as the peasants were concerned was to make a final end of serfdom and villeinage, and generally to convert copyhold into freehold. Moreover a large part of the aristocracy had fled abroad, and the estates of these *émigrés* were either confiscated by the State or directly seized by peasants and divided up. The domains of the Church were similarly disposed of.

<sup>1</sup> Who was a State official.—N. H.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge Modern History*, Volume VIII, p. 61.

It happened, however, that in some parts of the country the nobles and other landowners remained and were able through the varying fortunes of the political struggle to hold fast on to their estates. This was particularly the case in the north-west.

When the Monarchy was restored in 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon the *émigrés* returned, and the Church regained much of its former power. In some districts a reign of terror was organised against the peasants, and the former landlords under cover of the terror were able to re-enter into possession of some of their lost lands. In cases where they did not succeed in doing so by direct action, Villèle's compensation law which passed both assemblies by a large majority in 1825 secured for them the means to provide themselves with new estates. By an ingenious conversion of the 5 per cent stock, Villèle was able to provide 1,000,000,000 francs yearly as compensation to those who had had their land confiscated in 1790, without increasing taxes. In this way he was able to carry through a measure which might otherwise have failed in the face of republican opposition.

But the large properties which survived the Revolution were no longer feudal demesnes. Either the proprietor had to find the capital necessary to undertake the cultivation of his property himself with hired labour, or he had to let it in whole or in part to tenants, generally on ordinary money leases. The position of the proprietor of noble descent thus became identical with that of the commoner, formerly a big copyholder or *roturier*. Both now became the absolute freehold owners. The law of succession to land, established by the Code Napoléon, provided that the estate should be equally divided amongst the children, except that daughters received only part of the share inherited by sons. Thus for more than a century a powerful

factor has been at work, inimical to the concentration of landed property in a few hands. Estates and farms are being continuously sub-divided.

On the other hand this process has been offset by the absolute power reserved by law to the individual proprietor to dispose of land during his own lifetime. Land may be freely bought and sold, and during the long period when home agriculture was being sacrificed to the demands of industry for cheap food and raw materials, small properties, small farms have been bought up by rich peasants able to lower the costs of production by farming on a big scale. By 1884 2 per cent of the proprietors of land owned 36 per cent of the soil of France.

Thus, contrary to an impression which is widespread on this side of the Channel, France is by no means exclusively a land of small peasant proprietors. As has now been shown, the existing freehold properties have come into being mainly in three ways. The oldest are the remains of the former manorial lands which escaped confiscation in the French Revolution, or were restored to their owners after 1815. Such properties are generally large. Next come the properties originally acquired as copyhold at various dates between the twelfth century and 1789. These vary from large farms, or even groups of farms, down to mere minute parcels, often too small to be worked profitably. Lastly, dating from the Revolution of 1789, there are the properties carved out of lands previously in the possession of the Crown, Church, and Aristocracy by the peasants, who acquired them by seizure or in other ways.

In 1882 it was estimated that agricultural and forestal land in private ownership was divided into 12,115,277 properties. The average size of these properties was only about ten acres. It is highly probable that the actual

number of separate owners of land was much smaller, the official figures giving no information as to the number of properties belonging to one and the same person.

Nine-tenths of these properties were less than 25 acres in size; 696,579 were between 25 and 100 acres in extent; 163,324 were of more than 100 acres. Amongst these latter there are a number of really big landed estates, and also many large farms farmed by their owners. They are to be found to some extent in almost every part of the country, but particularly round Paris, in Picardy, in the west, and in the centre in such regions as the Sologne. Many extend to several thousand acres; even to 25,000 acres, being comparable to the largest agricultural estates in England.

As is the case here, so also in France the big landed properties are as often as not owned by people prominent in industry and commerce. Either the successful industrialist or banker has desired to become a landed proprietor, or, conversely, the heirs to country estates have taken to trade. There has been inter-marriage, with the result that no very great difference of outlook remains between the descendants of the old aristocracy and those who have acquired their estates in more recent times. Nevertheless it is well to remember that the feudal tradition by no means disappeared for good and all with the advent of the Revolution. In a book<sup>1</sup> published as late as 1908, an English writer who knew the French countryside well has much to say about the persistence amongst the old families of landed proprietors of a feeling akin to contempt for those lower in the social scale than themselves. He gives a vivid description of a conversation he once had in an empty château in Burgundy with the caretaker:

<sup>1</sup> *Round my House*, by P. G. Hamerton, Seeley & Co., 1908.

"You sec that small pool of water on the terrace just before the *perron* at the front door? Well, the house was inhabited by two brothers, who suspected their sister and the gardener of a mutual attachment, so to put an end to it they simply went and drowned him in that little ornamental pool, holding him down in the shallow water until life was quite extinct.

"This," comments the English landscape painter, "is the true middle-age spirit, which lingers still in the old families—that spirit which looks upon inferiors as its prey, and removes whatever comes between a desire and its accomplishment."

The great landed proprietors exert their influence on a national scale as well as in their own localities. Thus on the Committee of the most influential agricultural society in the country, the *Agriculteurs de France*, are to be found the names of the Marquis de Vogué (who is also prominent in 'big business') of the Comtes de Bucci, de Felcourt, de Warren, d'Olliamson, de la Rochefoucauld, de Rochambeau, de Dampierre, de Monicault, de Germiny, de Moustiers-Morinville, and de Guébriant, not to mention other persons of title.

Such a leading industrialist as M. Guy de Wendel, one of the heads of the powerful *Comité des Forges*, is also on the Committee of the *Agriculteurs de France*.

"In the Brie country one comes across whole villages owned by the same farmer; land and houses. Such is the case at Compans (Seine-et-Marne) worked by M. Garnier. In the Aisne industrialisation has reached such a point that one encounters what might be described as grain-factories comprising thousands of hectares. The Ferté family owns most of the domains of the Soissonnais. In the North, in the vicinity of Cambrai there are sugar-factories which own thousands of hectares and entire villages. Those who wax rich on the land are

often the same people whom one comes across in other branches of economy, who are big shareholders or directors of industrial, commercial, and financial companies. M. de Rothschild, ex-Regent of the Bank of France, all-powerful millionaire, owns extensive properties in the Seine-et-Marne, in Savoy, in the Pyrénées Orientales, and the Gironde. M. Hottinguer, another ex-Regent, has immense estates in the Seine-et-Marne and Seine-et-Oise. . . . M. Schneider, the big armaments manufacturer . . . great tracts of forest in the Nièvre and the Cher."<sup>1</sup>

It is by no means rare to find large landowners who farm little or none of their land, the estates being divided up into farms of various sizes, let at a money-rent, or on the system of crop-sharing known as *métayage*. On the other hand some of the most valuable properties are vineyards situated in the regions of *grands crus* such as Champagne, Burgundy, and Médoc. Here the proprietor often owns the land, the vines, and the necessary plant for making wine and storing it in cellars, and the business is handed down from one generation to the next.

It would be interesting to have an idea what sum is being paid annually in agricultural rents. Information however, is difficult to obtain. In Great Britain it amounts to about £50,000,000 a year,<sup>2</sup> but in this country about three-quarters of the farmed land is let to tenant-farmers, whereas in 1892 only 47·22 per cent of the agricultural land in France was let instead of being cultivated by the owners. Nevertheless in view of the fact that practically a half of the farmlands are being rented by tenants it is difficult to escape the conclusion that landlords' rents are an important factor in French agricultural economy;

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Agricultural Workers' Conference, January, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> *Agriculture*, by Pointing and Burns, 1927.

the influence of the landlord can easily be underestimated as an element in the shaping of the State's agricultural policy.

In 1929 some 69 million acres were being farmed by the owners. The two main classes of tenants are the *fermiers*, who lease their land at a money-rent, and the *métayers*, who do not pay a fixed rent, but make over a share of their produce to the landlord after the harvest. In 1929 there were 728,131 *fermiers* or cash tenants. They farmed 34,692,500 acres. *Métayers*, or share tenants, were considerably less numerous. They farmed 11,582,500 acres, and their number was 198,783; much less than a third the number of the cash-tenants.

At that time the total number of cultivators was 3,655,895 of whom 74·5 per cent were owners of their land.

What is the average size of an agricultural holding in France? According to the 1892 census it was then only about 15 acres. By 1929 the average size of holdings had increased to 29·1 acres, a remarkable indication of the extent to which concentration had proceeded. Even allowing for the existence of much intensive cultivation such as vineyards, market-gardens, orchards, etc., farms of this size can scarcely be regarded as adequate to provide a decent livelihood for a fair-sized household. Not all the peasant cultivators therefore are able to live entirely off their own land.

Thus in 1892 about three-quarters of a million peasants who possessed land of their own, supplemented their resources by working as day labourers. In 1929 44,375 undertook the cultivation of additional land on a crop-sharing basis and 1,004,647 on cash leases. Doubtless some of the small cultivators find an additional source of livelihood in petty trade or in governmental employment.

CLASSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS IN 1892

<i>Size</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
1 hectare	2,235,405	39·2	1,327,253	2·5
1 to 10 hectares	2,617,558	45·9		
10 „ 40 „	711,118	12·5		
Over 40 „	138,671	2·4	22,493,395	45·6
	5,702,752	100·0		

By 1929 profound changes had taken place:

CLASSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS IN 1929

<i>Size</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Area in Hectares</i>	<i>Average Hectares</i>
0 to 1 hectare	1,014,731	25·3	724,908	0·71
0 „ 10 hectares	1,863,867	47·1	9,556,284	5·13
10 „ 50 „	973,520	24·6	22,437,770	23·04
50 „ 100 „	81,844	2·1	6,126,880	74·95
Over 100 „	32,468	0·8	7,359,477	226·64
TOTAL	3,966,430	100·0	46,205,319	11·64

These figures, which are still valid for general purposes, indicate what considerable numbers of the peasant population are in the position of having insufficient land to provide them with a reasonable standard of living. Professor Michael of the United States Department of Agriculture comments thus on the low standard of living revealed by the 1892 enquiry:

“Considering the two classes of small and very small holdings together, it is safe to assume that, on the average, 85 per cent of the land holdings, exclusive of woods and forests, and averaging only 5·4 acres, could not produce sufficient field crops per holding to furnish



food for an average family of five adults and the food for the farm animals maintained except on a basis of a standard of living far below that of rural United States."

Later figures do not suggest that the position has been subsequently modified in favour of the small farmer. Thus in 1934 some ten thousand wine-growers had a total output of 29 million hectolitres as against only 35 million produced by the remaining 1,400,000.

In the same year three-and-a-half million wheat growers, representing 88 per cent of the total number only accounted for 35 million quintals of a harvest which exceeded 95 million quintals, a bare 37 per cent.

It is clear, therefore, that farms are of very unequal size. Side by side with the often minute holdings of the working peasants, there exist tens of thousands of farms of the kind that can only be worked with considerable capital and the employment of a good deal of outside labour. Such large farms are to be found particularly in northern France. They are predominant in Picardy and in the Paris region, and are common in Brittany and Normandy in the west, and in certain particularly rich areas such as the Nivernais in central France.

The situation of tenant-farmers is not always very well secured under French law. Two types of lease, both relating to stock, may serve as an illustration. There is a form of lease called the *cheptel de fer*. Under this form of contract the incoming tenant takes over so much head of stock at the time he enters into possession of his farm. A valuation is made. Again when the lease expires there takes place a second valuation. The increased value (if any) accrues to the tenant, but if there is a deficit he must make up the loss to his landlord. It may happen that through natural causes, such as sickness, or again through a fall in market-prices, the deficit may be considerable.

# FRANCE

## DISTRIBUTION OF LARGE, MEDIUM & SMALL-SCALE CULTIVATION



Average over 50 acres  
BLACK

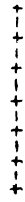
Average 25 to 50 acres  
SHADED

Average under 25 acres  
WHITE

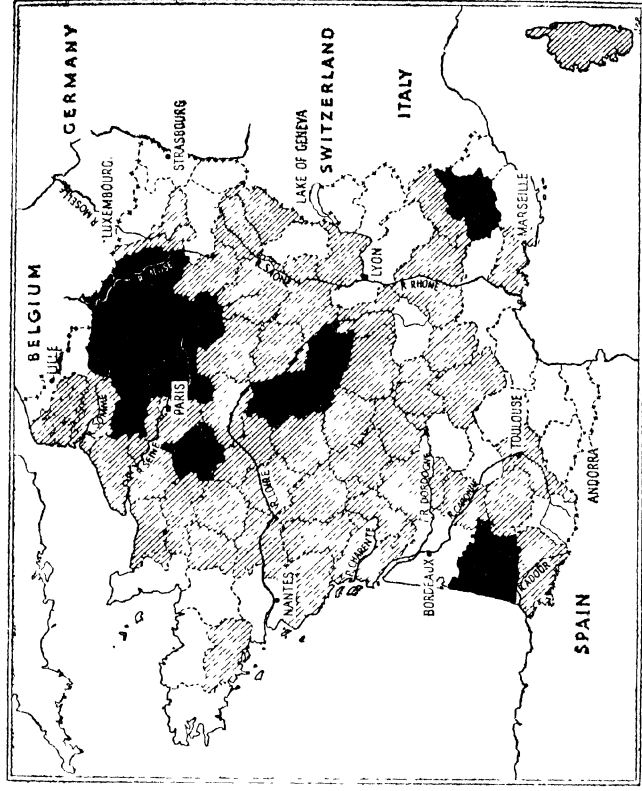


RIVERS

INTERNATIONAL  
BOUNDARY



DEPARTMENTAL  
BOUNDARIES



Clearly the landlord is in the better position. He is protected against loss of his capital, and receives interest upon it in the form of rent. On the other hand, while the tenant *may* as a result of careful farming increase the value of the stock on his farm, he is quite likely to lose heavily for the reasons already stated. The *cheptel de fer* type of lease allots to him the disposal of the milk, wool, etc. He may not, however, dispose of the manure, nor seek to make profit out of the hiring of the horses and other draught animals, which are regarded as being part-and-parcel of the farm, there to ensure its full exploitation.

Another type of stock-lease is more equitable from the tenant's point of view. This is the *cheptel simple*. In this case the tenant shares with his landlord both profits and losses, except that milk and manure are set aside for the tenant. In all other respects the produce is divided equally. There is, however, a curious provision to the effect that total loss of livestock is borne by the landlord, but partial loss falls on the tenant. Since the total loss of all the stock on a particular farm is a singularly rare occurrence, it would seem the *cheptel simple* also may operate frequently to the disadvantage of tenants.

Most agricultural leases are terminable at the will of the landlord as they are in England.

The provisions of leases governing the letting of land likewise in some cases operate disastrously to the detriment of the tenant. A case has recently received publicity of a small tenant-farmer who took a farm in 1930 at a rental calculated as the value of 3 quintals of wheat per hectare of land. At the time the market-price of wheat was 165 francs per quintal. He had therefore to pay 495 francs per hectare, which was a not unreasonable rent in view of the fact that the average yield per hectare is normally in the neighbourhood of 16 quintals. However, with the

catastrophic fall in the price of wheat four years later it was necessary for this farmer to sell almost double as much wheat as had been necessary in the first year of his lease in order to pay the rent. The great drop in prices brought the question of rent charges much to the fore a year or two ago, and it is not surprising that many tenants fell heavily in arrears with their rents. In some parts of Brittany as many as four-fifths of the tenants were said to owe for several instalments.

Systems of land-tenure, substituting for the fixed rental which is the universal custom in Great Britain, an obligation on the part of the cultivator to make over a share of his crop, are widely practised in many parts of the world. From very early times such systems have been in vogue in the Nile valley, and on the cotton plantations in the Gezira lying between the Blue and the White Niles the practice has been retained in a modern form. There the actual tenant cultivators receive two-fifths the value of their crop of cotton, the remainder going to the Government (which undertook the main irrigation works) and the limited liability company which provides the supervisory staff and takes charge of the minor canalisation.

In France this crop-sharing system is known as *métayage* and is of considerable antiquity. In 1892 the number of *métayers* or share-tenants was 344,000 equivalent to 7·18 per cent of the aggregate number of cultivators. Land cultivated in this way represented 10·85 per cent of the total agricultural area and amounted to 9,308,000 acres. The 1929 census estimate puts the number of *métayers* at a lower figure, namely 192,783 and the area cultivated at 4·65 million hectares. The average size of farms held under this form of tenure therefore appears nowadays to be about 58 acres, which is more than double the 1892 figure. Seldom is the *métairie* of a size to require a large

number of labourers to work it. The detailed provisions of contracts of *métayage* vary greatly throughout the thirty or more departments where it obtains:

“*Métayage* is governed by the law of July 18th, 18 and by local custom. . . .

“The stipulations laid down by the landlord are extremely varied. In some cases he provides the stock; in other cases the tenant does this, or each may provide a quota.

“Usually the crop and all produce is divided equally; in certain cases, according to the particular region and locality the *métayer* takes rather more, or rather less.

“When labour is employed by the *métayer*, the landlord may pay wages leaving the *métayer* to provide food. Generally the latter is required to find both the food and wages of the labourers. Conditions vary from department to department, from commune to commune; often from one *métairie* to the next, and they are of such diversity as almost to escape the possibility of classification.”<sup>1</sup>

This form of tenure is common in many of the western parts of France (as for instance in Brittany) in the Bourbonnais, but above all in Aquitaine and north of the Pyrenees. In these latter regions possibly a third of the cultivators are *métayers*, and many are foreigners. Amongst the *métayers* in such departments as the Lot-et-Garonne, Gironde, Gers, Landes, etc., it is estimated that 14 per cent are Italians, 5 per cent Poles, and 1 per cent Spanish.

The status of share-tenant is an extremely insecure one: he can be evicted without notice. At the same time he is often required by his contract (which may be only verbal) to perform many irksome services for his landlord,

<sup>1</sup> *La Voix Paysanne*, January 30th, 1937.

services which recall the conditions obtaining in feudal times. There are such obligations upon the *métayer* as, for instance, to fatten a pig for the owner without payment, or to cart his harvest from field to barn. He may be required to keep the landlord supplied with poultry for his table, and is sometimes made even to pay part of the taxes.

Landlords who dispose of their land in this way are generally well-to-do. Owing to the difficulty of many cultivators in finding the necessary capital for farming they are prepared to accept contracts of this type rather than renounce their calling. The landowner is thus in the double position of providing the land and of financing the farmer. It is understandable that *métayage* is a system fruitful in abuses. There have been several occasions on which friction has developed to the point of concerted action being taken by the *métayers* of a given region to obtain re-dress. Instances of such action being carried to a successful conclusion occurred in the Landes and the lower Adour in 1920 and the following years.

The practice of leasing land on the *métayage* system is not, however, confined to the large landowners. A good many small peasant-owners who have become too old to work their land themselves are accustomed, when there is no son to take their place, to hand it over to someone else, who cultivates it as a *métayer*. Receiving a share of the produce in kind the old peasant is thus able to provide for his wants and may possibly avoid the necessity, not only of cultivating the land, but also of taking his goods to market.

A system resembling *métayage* obtains in the Sarthe in Southern Normandy. It is known as *bordage* and is of ancient origin. The *borderies* are also cultivated on a basis of crop-

sharing between the landowner and the tenant. They are generally very small, varying between eight and a dozen acres in size.

Amongst other forms of tenancy peculiar to certain districts may be mentioned a form of lease current in Brittany, where it has been in existence since Roman times, and which received legislative sanction in 1791. Under this form of lease the landlord in addition to the land, buildings, and stock, puts a fund of money at the disposal of the tenant for upkeep, on which a fixed return is stipulated to be paid. On the termination of the lease, expert arbitrators assess the amount the tenant has expended on improvements and upkeep, and only the balance of the fund has to be repaid. Ancient land-customs of which this is one example, have persisted right up to the present day in Brittany, which was perhaps the province least affected by the Revolution of 1789. Much of the land still remains in the possession of the former feudal aristocracy.

In the Goële and Maltien districts near Paris, where are some of the richest farms in the country, a system known as *marchés de terre* prevails whereby the big farming proprietors let off parcels of land to small tenant farmers who are required to dispose of all their produce through the landlord who has barns and machinery but usually does not cultivate land himself.

The status of tenants thus varies considerably in different parts of the country and even between one property and another in the same locality. Up to the present time there has been no effective protection afforded by law to the tenant against summary ejection at the end of his lease, and there can be little doubt that the whole matter of tenants' rights is destined to become a burning question in the very near future.

The total population engaged in agriculture is now between seven and eight million. Since the number of agricultural holdings is in the neighbourhood of five and three quarter millions, clearly at least two million who follow an agricultural calling are without land of their own. A large number may, however, be relatives of cultivators, assisting the head of the family on his farm. On the other hand a very large percentage of small peasants work as day-labourers in addition to cultivating their own tiny plots. The 1892 census gives the numbers of such as about three-quarters of a million.

There are no exact figures of the number of agricultural labourers in France, comparable in accuracy with the annual return included in the statistics of our own Ministry of Agriculture (for England and Wales). M. Victor Boret estimated quite recently the number in France to be 2,500,000. M. Echégut, General Secretary of the *Fédération Nationale de Travailleurs de l'Agriculture*, considers this estimate to err on the low side, and that if both sexes are included there are about three million agricultural labourers in France at the present time.

Wage-labour is employed on farms of medium size as well as on the bigger ones. According to the census of 1931, there were 1,050,000 holdings on which from one to five workers were employed. Some of these would presumably be seasonal, and it is certainly the practice for labourers to follow the harvest from one part of the country to another, since the work of harvesting is by no means synchronous throughout the whole of France for obvious climatic reasons.

But there are undoubtedly many hundreds of thousands who are employed on big farms where division of labour is the rule and the farmer himself in most cases does little or no manual labour. It is probable that the greater part



of the 200,000 labourers estimated to be employed in the three departments, Seine, Seine-et-Marne, and Seine-et-Oise near Paris are to be found on farms of this type.

One of the outstanding effects of the Great War was the shortage of labour in the post-war period in France. It was particularly severely felt in agriculture, where to the two factors, migration into more remunerative employment in the towns, and low birth-rate, a third—war casualties—was now added. As a result of the shortage of labour, France adopted a policy of encouraging immigration, and large numbers of foreigners flooded into the country in search of work. In more recent years a succession of Conservative Governments, as a means of alleviating unemployment, sought to reverse the process and arranged for extensive repatriation of immigrant workers, a measure that was strenuously opposed by the organised labour movement. It is probable that about half-a-million foreigners were compelled during these years to leave.

Nevertheless the number remaining is considerable, and it is estimated that there are between 500,000 and 600,000 engaged in agriculture including families. Poles form a big majority, but there are also many Italians, Belgians, and Arabs, and some Spaniards.

On the larger farms a more extensive use of machinery has, as might be expected, reduced the amount of employment available. M. Dumont<sup>1</sup> gives an instance of a farm of 875 acres near Laon which gave regular employment in 1913 to eighteen ploughmen and cattle-tenders and twenty-two other hands as well as to twenty seasonally for six months in two periods, equivalent to another ten, making a total of fifty on the average for the whole year.

<sup>1</sup> *Misère ou Prospérité Paysanne ?* p. 149.

The same farm now has three heavy-oil tractors and cable traction as well for certain types of ploughing. Only twenty workers all told are employed during the year, and if seasonal workers are included the average daily figure of employment is twenty-nine, a reduction of forty-two per cent.

The trend of agricultural wages in France since the war and particularly during the period of the world crisis has been entirely different from the trend in Great Britain. Here the wages of farm labourers rose considerably in the period immediately following the war, and even during the war, and have since been generally maintained or even in some cases have increased. In view of the admitted shortage of native-born labour it might be anticipated that a similar tendency on the part of the wage-levels would have manifested itself in France. Such has not been the case. M. Echégut gives the following details of wage reductions that occurred recently in various parts of the country:—

Wine-growing areas: Where the average daily rate in 1930 was 25 francs it subsequently fell to 12–14 francs, or, where there was organised resistance on the part of the workers to 18–20 francs, thus showing a reduction of from 25 to 40 per cent. In the Beauce, the rate for the whole season dropped from 3,300–3,800 francs to 1,800–2,000 in 1935; a reduction of 30 to 40 per cent. In the Brie country daily rates dropped from 25 francs to 16 and 14, even 12. In Brittany the rate of 3,500 to 4,000 francs a year dwindled to 2,000 and sometimes less. The toilsome labour of hoeing sugar-beet, for which at one time 350–400 francs per hectare was paid, was later being done for only 200 francs. Women's wages were correspondingly lower. Dumont mentions wages of only 8 francs for men and 7 for women being paid in Normandy

during the summer of 1935 and even as little as 5 and 6 francs in Brittany and the Vendée. The very low level of wages obtaining in agriculture is advanced as the main reason for children of ten and eleven being taken away from school by their parents to work on the land. The practice is said to be common enough although the school leaving age is officially fourteen.

Extremely long hours are worked on the land. On the large farms of the Paris region the average working day was thirteen hours prior to the war and quite recently it was still eleven. However, in some parts of the country as a result of the wave of strikes in June, 1936, there has been a sharp diminution in the maximum number of hours which may be worked. In the two important departments of the Seine-et-Oise and Seine-et-Marne near Paris a collective contract has been signed between the trade-unions and the employers limiting work on the farms to eight hours in winter, nine in spring and autumn, and ten in summer. One complete rest-day a week is guaranteed.<sup>1</sup>

It is the custom in some districts to provide board and lodging, as part of the wages received by farm-labourers. Complaints regarding the quality of the cider and wine and meagre food have been very frequent. Unmarried labourers are often required to sleep on straw beside the animals in the cattle shed. Rural housing has made little progress. A law relating to the improvement of dwellings occupied by agricultural workers, framed in 1929, has remained a dead letter.

Social services have been applied very tardily in the case of the agricultural labourer. The machinery for arbitration between master and servant which obtains in most branches of industry has not yet been established

<sup>1</sup> Vide Appendix A.

for agriculture. A local initiative taken at Gien recently ended in failure. The system of family allowances which dates in some cases to as far back as 1860, and which was made obligatory for all branches of industry including agriculture in 1932, has yet to be carried into effect as regards the agricultural labourer. Health insurance gives much lower benefits to the agricultural than to the industrial worker, although the former may often have to pay more for the doctor's visit, should he happen to live at a distance from the centre of his village. There is no labour inspection as yet in agriculture, although accidents are numerous, and are increasing. In 1932 there were 276 fatal accidents and no fewer than 43,577 reported, each involving incapacity for a period of five days or more.

Marcel Braibant gives the following table which well illustrates the inferior position of the agricultural worker compared with other categories. The table refers to five families, each with six children, and all living in the same village in the Aisne department in 1931:

	<i>Farm-labourer</i>	<i>Industrial-worker (unskilled)</i>	<i>Road-mender</i>	<i>Railway-man</i>	<i>Post-man</i>
Yearly wage .	7,500	8,500	8,100	9,900	10,000
House and garden	1,000	—	—	—	—
State Assistance .	480	1,020	—	—	—
Various					
Allowances .	—	—	—	—	500
Family Allowance	—	2,280	8,940	8,280	8,940
Total (francs)	8,980	11,800	17,040	18,180	19,440

That a farm-hand with a large family should be receiving less than half what a rural postman in the same village was getting is proof indeed that the agricultural proletariat is in a most unenviable position.

Besides those who are directly dependant upon agriculture as a means of livelihood there are of course other classes of persons who form an integral part of French rural society as at present constituted, share in greater or lesser degree in the fortunes of the agricultural industry, and exert influence in divers ways on the farming community. Not very long ago it could be said without fear of exaggeration that of such classes the Roman Catholic clergy were by far the most important. That has been less true since the beginning of the twentieth century, when measures such as the Law separating Church from State were brought into force, and generally the campaign against clerical influence reached its highest point.<sup>1</sup> There are grounds for believing that during and since the War the influence of the Church has once more been somewhat consolidated but it is nevertheless an indisputable fact that in many country districts church attendance has shrunk almost to vanishing point, and even the buildings are in sad disrepair. This must not, however, be taken as representing the position everywhere. Indeed in some part of the country, as for instance in Brittany, the Church is still extremely flourishing, nor is there any doubt but that a high proportion of its revenues are derived from the various strata of the agricultural population over which its influence persists. Clerical influence is alleged to dominate in the counsels even of many apparently professional associations of agriculturists, as a rule those which, on the national scale, are grouped in and around the powerful *Société des Agriculteurs de France*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> At the time of the Separation, Aristide Briand who carried the measure through estimated the total value of Church property at 400 million francs, equivalent then to £16,000,000.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 220.

Writing of such organisations M. Augé Laribé observes:

“There are as a matter of fact agricultural syndicates owing their origin to Christian Social influences which have no compunction about beginning or winding up their deliberations with a Mass to which all members are summoned.”<sup>1</sup>

So strong is this influence in some localities that the poorer peasants do not venture openly to express sympathy with the *Front Populaire*. I have been told of cases in the Nièvre where the Catholic trade-unions are accustomed to hold their meetings in the house of the parish priest. Amongst peasant women in some parts of the country the *Ligue Patriotique des Femmes* exerts an influence which is not at all confined merely to ‘good works’.

While the Clergy as well as exerting an influence in agricultural affairs, derive indirectly a large part of their income from agriculture, there are other classes of people who have no very evident financial interest in agriculture, but who yet are far from being a negligible factor in agricultural communities. France resembles Great Britain in having an exceptionally large *rentier* element amongst its population. Some are extremely wealthy, many others on the other hand have just sufficient to allow them to live quietly without being under the necessity of earning their daily bread. In Great Britain a very considerable proportion of the *rentier* element is to be found in country parishes, particularly in the southern counties. It is probably true that in France the great majority of the *rentiers*, as well as the officers and functionaries who have retired on pension, prefer Paris or the provincial town, but they form nevertheless a fairly important element amongst the

<sup>1</sup> *Syndicats et Coopératives agricoles*, p. 33.

rural population, also participating in public activities of a general nature, and not infrequently in the administration of the various types of organisation specifically connected with agriculture.

Consideration of the question of how the agricultural population is represented in the French parliament must be left to a later chapter, when the whole problem of peasant participation in politics comes in for treatment. It would nevertheless be hardly excusable to omit at this point all reference to the machinery of local government as it affects the agricultural population.

The Third Republic endowed France with representative institutions embracing wide spheres of public activity and on a scale sufficiently decentralised to permit of those actually engaged in the cultivation of the soil taking some part in local affairs.

The structure of local government in the rural areas comprises three stages. At the base are the communes, corresponding roughly to the parish. There were 33,960 communes in 1931 having less than 1,500 inhabitants, and this is roughly the number which can properly be classified as agricultural. The affairs of the commune are managed by the *maire* and his *adjoint* and the *conseil municipal* of from ten to thirty-six members. All are elected. Elections take place every four years, and all male citizens over the age of twenty-one have the right to vote. The office of *maire* is of some importance. He is the representative of the Government, charged frequently with the duty of seeing that the provisions of laws affecting his commune are observed, and he is responsible for the maintenance of public order. The communes have their own budgets and the *conseil municipal* has a certain control over such fields as education, sanitation, and roads. These elected bodies are the means of bringing some four

hundred thousand citizens, largely drawn from the ranks of the peasantry, into an active participation in public life.

In the next stage, that of the *arrondissement*, there is again an elected body, the *Conseil d'arrondissement*. Its functions are, however, mainly advisory, though it has executive authority in regard to the apportionment of the direct taxes amongst the communes. But the *arrondissement* is at the same time the sphere of action of the sub-prefect, who is a civil servant with powers not paralleled by anything found in Great Britain. The *arrondissement* has no budget. The total number in 1931, including urban *arrondissements*, was 279.

The *conseil-général* corresponds most closely to our county councils. There is one for each of the ninety departments. Elections are held every year in a third of the cantons (which group an average of a dozen communes) for one *conseiller-général* per canton, who holds office for three years. The departmental *conseil-général* disposes of its own budget, and undertakes a variety of administrative functions. Its powers are on the whole, however, less comprehensive than those of the county councils here. This is explained by the persistence after the Revolution of a conception of centralised governmental control over local affairs which developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the appointment of royal *intendants* having important administrative functions. Like the *intendant* the prefect is the representative in his department of the Central Government. He is a civil servant vested with wide powers under the law, and enjoying considerable social prestige. His office is more comparable with that of the provincial commissioners in certain of the British Crown Colonies than with any official post in Great Britain to-day.



The judicial apparatus in France is less closely associated with the country population than is the case with the administration. On the civil side as on the criminal it starts with the *juge de paix*, of whom there is one in each of the 2,911 cantons in the country. In each *arrondissement* there is a *Tribunal de première instance*, which deals in the first instance with cases beyond the competence of the *juge de paix*, and also serves as the court of appeal from his decision. This court has a president, vice-president, and a number of judges, and attached to it is a *procureur*, or State prosecutor. There are no regular courts established to cover the departments, and only trial for serious crimes takes place at the departmental headquarters. The procedure is for an assize to be held every three months, a presiding judge being sent down from the competent court of appeal. Assize cases are tried with a jury of twelve.

The Courts of Appeal number twenty-six. They are situated in the large centres, and are divided into sections, each with its own president for dealing with different classes of appeals.

In commerce there exists an institution called the *Tribunal de Commerce*, where members are elected by the merchants of the locality. It tries, with the consent of the parties, questions of business transactions and there is an appeal to the higher courts. No such elective body has made its appearance in the field of agriculture.

The question of military service is an important one in many ways for the peasantry, above all owing to the obligation upon able-bodied youths to serve two years in the armed forces at a time when they are often beginning to become indispensable to parents who are getting on in life. The question of furlough for conscripts required to assist at harvest-time, etc., has, however, been partially

solved in recent times, the Chambers of Agriculture having made strong representations in favour of some concession being made by the military authority to the needs of agriculture. In reply to a parliamentary question the Minister of War defined the existing position as follows:

“Article I of the Law of March 17, 1936, provides that persons undergoing military service, who have been employed on agricultural work for a minimum unbroken period of twelve months immediately prior to being called up, may be granted furlough for seasonal work . . . which must not exceed ten days.”

When serving with his unit the French soldier is debarred from exercising the franchise. Soldiers who happen to be on leave when an election is in progress in their electoral district, may, however, record their vote. This applies to the elections for the Chambers of Agriculture as for Parliament and the organs of local government.

The War of 1914-1918 imposed a particularly severe strain on small peasant economy. It happened frequently that a farm was left without any able-bodied man to look after it, and the women, old men, and boys had to do the best they could. Naturally under such conditions the land got into a bad condition, the stock dwindled, and the instruments of production and the buildings fell into disrepair. What would be the effect of another period of war on the small peasantry is impossible to foresee, but in view of the changed character of war and the worsened position of the poorer peasants since the last war ended, it is hardly possible to conceive of small-scale farming being able to survive.

The position is very well understood amongst the French peasants who have a passionate hatred of war. Their attitude on this question has long been a dominant

factor in French politics and is likely to remain so as long as the threat of war persists.

In France, which has long had conscription for military service, the outlook of the personnel of the armed forces must inevitably constitute a vitally important factor in times of political crisis. To what extent would the army be a reliable instrument at the disposal of a Left-wing Government in the event of an internal conflict developing; in face say of a possible *coup d'état* being attempted by the forces of the Right?

Broadly speaking, some 40 to 50 per cent of the Metropolitan army is drawn from the country districts. But the percentage of peasant elements is not uniform throughout all arms. It is lowest in the specialised arms such as the artillery, engineers, and now also the mechanised infantry. In these, and in the air force, skilled workers from the towns tend to predominate. In the cavalry, on the other hand, it is high, and there the proportion of men coming from wealthy farming and land-owning families is considerable. The bulk of the poorer peasants and the agricultural labourers find their way into the non-mechanised infantry. Probably as much as 60 per cent of the rank-and-file in this, the most numerous, arm of the service is drawn from this stratum. Particularly in recent years the rural youth has tended to be less conservative than the peasantry in general, and since the army is drawn from the youth, this tendency must be taken into account.

Amongst the non-commissioned officers of the infantry there is a high proportion of re-engaged men of small-peasant origin. But in general such men, with the lapse of time, become detached from their original associations and are less and less influenced by the currents of opinion prevailing in the villages from which they came. As regards the commissioned officers it is safe to assume that

the number drawn from the ranks of the small and middle peasantry is almost negligible. Even amongst the officers of the reserve it is the exception to find any who are actively engaged in agriculture. Such of them as hail from country districts are much more generally engaged in commerce or in one of the professions; a fair proportion being schoolmasters.

In general, therefore, it would be true to say that the large peasant element in the army instinctively sympathises with those parties whose policy appears most likely to secure the maintenance of peace. In the past the parties of the Right have on frequent occasions successfully come forward as the champions of peace. That their efforts are still directed towards creating such an impression there can be no doubt at all. In barracks where Left-wing newspapers are discouraged when they are not proscribed, their task is easier than it can be in civil life where the peasant and working-class youth have fuller opportunities for studying both sides of the question.

The agricultural profession in France has its own elected bodies. In 1924 the establishment of Chambers of Agriculture in every department was authorised by Parliament. In November, 1935, a decree-law instituted a central body for the whole country, known as the *Assemblée Permanente des Présidents des Chambres d'Agriculture*.

The Chambers of Agriculture dispose of a budget, and are empowered to subsidise research, agricultural shows, etc. Their principal source of revenue is derived from a 10 centimes addition to the land-tax. A chamber is composed of four members, elected in each *arrondissement* by individuals having the right to vote, and as many additional members as there are *arrondissements*, elected by the various agricultural organisations in the department.

All proprietors, and users of agricultural land over twenty-five years of age if men, and women who are actually farming, or who took the place of their menfolk as farmers during the War, have, subject to certain provisos, the right to vote for the election of members of the Chambers of Agriculture. Agricultural labourers of the male sex above twenty-five years also have the right to vote, but only on condition that they have worked for five years in the same commune. Polling takes place on a Sunday and in each commune.

The Chambers of Agriculture are consulted on agricultural matters by the Prefect and the Government, and are authorised to represent the interests of the agricultural community *vis-à-vis* the authorities. In their twelve years of existence they have done much to further the interests of agriculture as a whole.

The aggregate number of members of the various Chambers of Agriculture is 1,536 elected by individuals and a further 384 elected by agricultural organisations.

Voters are not inscribed on the electoral rolls unless they apply to be inscribed. Out of the total of about eight million persons engaged in agricultural occupations the actual number inscribed in 1927 was 3,323,487, or about 40 per cent. It is difficult to say what proportion of those engaged in agriculture can claim the right to vote. Large numbers are of course disqualified by reason of being under twenty-five years of age. Again, except in special circumstances, women are excluded. Labourers who move from one commune to another in the course of a year or two are generally ineligible to vote, nor are the large number of foreign labourers and tenant cultivators in enjoyment of the franchise.

Nevertheless it is very probable that the number actually figuring on the electoral lists falls considerably short of

the total number who are eligible as voters under the existing laws.

In 1927 the proportion of voters who exercised their right to vote was almost exactly 50 per cent of the number inscribed. The number of agricultural organisations participating in the elections was 22,393, out of a possible total at least three times greater.

Agriculture has also its elective machinery on a national scale, for in 1935 a Permanent Assembly of Presidents of Chambers of Agriculture was established by law with an office in Paris (Rue Scribe). The central body is consulted on agricultural questions by the Government, Chamber, and Senate. Its budget is financed largely through the addition of 1 centime on the land-tax.

The Permanent Assembly has six commissions, all functioning regularly. These deal with: (1) professional organisation and rural legislation, (2) external questions (regulation of imports and exports, etc.), (3) general economy, (4) vegetable products, (5) animal products, and (6) fermented and distilled liquors.

A further and extremely important extension of the elective principle in the sphere of agriculture dates only from the summer of 1936. The *Office du Blé*, or Grain Bureau, was one of the most outstanding achievements of the Blum Government in that year. The purpose of the bureau is to stabilise the price of wheat by price-fixing and other means. The bodies charged with the task have been specially created for the purpose. There is a local bureau in each department and a national bureau which is established in Paris. The national bureau is composed as follows:

Twenty-nine representatives of wheat producers; the members must themselves be actively engaged in farming and make it their principal occupation, eleven are appointed

by the Permanent Assembly of Presidents of Chambers of Agriculture, eighteen by the Wheat Co-operatives, six appointments being reserved for the departments in which small-scale production predominates.

Nine representatives of the consumers; three of these are appointed by the consumers' co-operatives, one by the Association of Large Families, three by the trade-unions, one by the Christian trade-unions, and one by the artisans' federation.

Nine representatives of the various commercial interests (millers, bakers, corn-merchants, etc.).

Four governmental representatives.

The bureaux in the departments are formed on a similar model.

The *Office du Blé* is an extremely interesting experiment from many points of view, not the least of which is that it for the first time gives the cultivator a really effective voice in determining the conditions under which his produce will be brought to market. It is possible, too, that the bringing together into one body of the representatives of co-operative societies of political tendencies which have varied widely in the past may have important results on the future development of agricultural co-operation.

Another institution owing its present structure to the government of the *Front Populaire* is the enlarged National Economic Council. On this body, whose General Assembly is comprised of 175 members, agriculture is strongly represented. There are twenty representatives of Chambers of Agriculture, twenty representatives of various agricultural organisations, and in addition several persons prominently associated with agriculture are included under other general headings.

Thus in the sphere of agriculture there has developed, particularly in recent years, a wide extension of the

principle of admitting popularly elected representatives of the mass of cultivators to participation in the tasks of shaping agricultural policy and exercising a means of control over the administration of agricultural affairs.

The sector reserved to the State remains, however, considerable.

In each department the Ministry maintains a Director of Agricultural Services, as well as other officers. The point of junction of the State administration and the elective bodies in the department is the *Office agricole*,<sup>1</sup> which is composed of three members elected by the Chamber of Agriculture and three members elected by the *Conseil général*, or county council. The Directors of Agriculture and of the Veterinary Service sit on this body in a consultative capacity.

Rural education in France is controlled by the seventeen Academies into which the country is divided, as well as by an educational council in each department, which deals only with primary education. This in addition to control by the Ministry of Education. In 1933-34 there were 5,199,537 pupils in primary schools (numbering 79,909) and 400,000 in infant schools. Very few of the latter are to be found in country districts.

The great majority of the teaching-staffs of primary schools are nowadays organised in a trade-union affiliated to the General Confederation of Labour. Amongst the women teachers there exists, however, a small but enthusiastic section which works under the name of *Les Davidées*. *Les Davidées* take their name from the heroine of a novel, and their avowed aim is to proselytise on behalf of the Catholic Church amongst their charges, religious instruction being no longer given in the State schools.

<sup>1</sup> Temporarily suspended by a decree-law of the Laval Government.—N. H.



In a certain number of rural communes "free" Catholic schools still continue side by side with the ordinary lay-schools maintained by the State.

Secondary education is difficult for the children of small peasants and agricultural labourers to obtain, partly because bursaries are necessary in order to make it possible to defray the expense of having to go into town, and even more because the children are required to go early to work to help their parents. The number of secondary school pupils throughout France in Nov. 1934 was: boys, 162,483; girls, 77,654. These figures include Algeria.

The Ministry of Agriculture maintains the National Agronomic Institute at Paris, the Veterinary School at Alfort, and the forestry school at Nancy, national agricultural schools at Grignon, Rennes, and Montpellier and forty-four local schools of agriculture.

During the deflationary period which culminated with the Cabinets of M. Doumergue and M. Laval the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture was the most severely curtailed of all departments. In 1933 the budget of the Ministry was 1,012,695,255 francs. Only a year later it had shrunk to 593,245,365 francs—a reduction of 42 per cent in a single year!

There can be little doubt that conditions of living for the mass of the rural population in France are far from coming up to the standards now obtaining in many parts of Southern England. Speaking to the International Agricultural Conference held within the framework of the World Peace Congress at Brussels in September 1936, M. Renaud Jean<sup>1</sup> painted a gloomy but incontestably accurate picture of present conditions. As he pointed out

<sup>1</sup> M. Renaud Jean is president of the agricultural committee of the Chamber of Deputies.—N. H.

to his audience his speech had been prepared at his own house, situated in the south-west, where, because of the variety of crops cultivated, conditions were far from being as bad as in some parts. Taking roads as an example, M. Jean observed:

“France is one of the countries best provided in the matter of roads. Probably every single canton is traversed by one or more tarred highways of modern type. These main roads are intersected by numberless secondary roads which are usually well kept up. Nevertheless many farms and sometimes hamlets have no other communication with a metalled road than across tracks which are simply quagmires in winter. In my own commune where road-metal is comparatively cheap, the cart-roads which constitute the sole link for one in ten of the inhabitants with the main system and the village would cost a great deal to be put in a proper state. But we are dealing with a relatively well-placed district from the point of view of sub-soil and relief. I should not be surprised if in some departments a quarter or a third of the peasant population lacked proper means of access to the outer-world.”

M. Jean proceeds to deal with housing:

“First point. The house is almost invariably old. There is little building in progress in the country. How could there be? Who could pay the costly charges? And if, in an exceptional case, the proprietor had the necessary resources at his disposal, why should he, short of absolute necessity, spend on buildings which when finished would be almost worthless? I look across to a farm, of a kind fairly common in my part of the world, built partly in brick, partly in wood and plaster, the whole dating perhaps from a hundred and fifty years back. About twenty-five acres of field and meadow go with it. One day it will just collapse. Who will be able to afford to re-build it? Not the farmer who lives there. He has not the means, nor could one expect him to build for his landlord!

Could not the latter? Hardly. He draws 4,000 francs from it in rent out of which he has to pay taxes, and urgent repairs. New buildings on the same scale as the old would cost him 40,000 or 50,000 francs, after which he would receive not a penny more rent, for the state of the buildings is not a determining factor."

M. Jean goes on to speak of the lack of living-room, of the frequency with which whole families, parents and children are compelled to share a single room.

In the greater part of the villages, let alone isolated habitations, it is general to find each household dependant still on its own well for water, even pumps are not universal, and water has to be hauled up laboriously in buckets. Fuel is gathered from the forest in the autumn. Gas, coal, and electricity are equally unknown as methods of heating. Consequently the peasant is half-frozen during the winter-months.

Lighting is no better in many places, despite the progress of electrification in favoured parts of the country. M. Jean estimated that to carry electric current to the isolated dwellings in his commune, despite the fact that the village itself is on the mains, would cost 600,000 francs, a sum quite beyond local resources.

A very similar picture is drawn by M. Marcel Braibant in his book, *D'abord la Terre*, published in 1935:

"The amenities of town life," writes this author, "stand out in violent contrast with the monotonous and primitive life of our country population.

"The peasant's grind never ceases. There is no weekly day of rest, no holiday for him who must tend the cattle; he must milk the cows morning and evening, Sundays as well as weekdays. Breeders of stock must be ever on the watch; there is always a beast to care for, a sick animal, a mare about to foal, a cow in trouble calving, a sow ready to give birth.

"Labour is becoming more and more scarce, and the farmer and his wife are obliged to undertake everything; it is impossible to leave the farm."

M. Braibant underlines the hard lot of the peasant woman:

"Formerly when the workers had to be fed on the produce of the farm, baking, weaving, all these branches of domestic economy were a heavy burden. To-day too, particularly on the small farms, the woman's task remains a heavy one. She has to busy herself at once with her housework, with the stable, and the farmyard, wading through mud and manure. Compelled to rise early to prepare coffee and milk the cows, late to bed after having done the mending, cleaned the kitchen, finished the washing and ironing, without a break, or a moment's repose, all days alike, peasant women must often lend a hand in the fields as well, help with the hay and the corn-harvest, and filling the granary, weeding the beets and potatoes, lift them in autumn in fields soaked and rain-swept."

The exceeding long hours worked on the land in France find their complement in the very limited facilities which exist for recreation. Particularly since the War there has been a notable increase in the amenities of life over wide areas of rural Britain. Young people have their playing fields, football, hockey, and cricket-grounds, their tennis-courts. Some villages have excellent bowling-greens. Village institutes and halls are becoming the rule rather than the exception. The cinema in a near-by town is within the reach of hundreds of thousands of country folk.

In French villages there is still an almost total lack of any such amenities. Money is lacking with which to meet the necessary capital expenditure on the construction of halls and places of public amusement; even were it forthcoming it is doubtful if many peasants and agricultural

workers could afford to take the time off for indulging in recreative activities. In all in the 38,000 communes of France there are said to be only 3,000 sports grounds and fifty swimming-baths! How many, one wonders, of these are to be found outside the towns? In all probability the number of playing-fields in the rural communes could be counted on the fingers of both hands.

Thus the psychology of the peasant has tended to become more and more a thing apart. He or she feels debarred from many of the things which make life tolerable for other members of the community. A sense of distrust is engendered in the peasant bosom which is not easy to eradicate.

Under such conditions it is not difficult to trace the reasons which lie at the root of the exodus of the younger members of the population away from the villages and into the towns. The following figures, showing the decline in the number of people living in communes of less than 2,000 inhabitants, shows how great this exodus has been:

	1846	1906	1926
Total population of France	35,401,761	39,252,245	—
Number residing in communes with less than 2,000 inhabitants . . .	26,650,446	22,715,011	—
Percentage . . .	75·6	57·9	50·9

Shortage of labour as a result of the exodus from the villages has, as was to be expected, favoured the process of the concentration of production into large units, a process not in itself uneconomical, but clearly offering no permanent solution of the agrarian question. M. Braibant instances the department of the Aisne in which in 1931 there were 1,182 farms between 125 and 250 acres in extent, 752 between 250 and 500, 415 between 500 and

1,250, and 31 of over 1,250 acres. He mentions one commune near Laon which was entirely occupied by four farms. Out of its population of 358 in 1931, 218 were foreigners.

The concentration of production has of course been still more rapid in the domain of the processing of agricultural produce. Here the substitution of joint-stock enterprise for individual property has greatly favoured the elimination of small-scale production. Nine-tenths of the smaller flour-mills have disappeared within the last half century. There are now only 232 maltings and 1,228 breweries in the whole country. The number of sugar factories is 102. The meat trade is largely controlled by the great Villette market at Paris which is in a few hands. In the case of most other products the position is very similar.

It is difficult, therefore, to resist the conclusion that the much-vaunted stability of French rural society does not bear close examination, and cannot seem very convincing to English observers acquainted with the facts. Enough has been said, for instance, to show that the situation of the agricultural labourer in France by no means compares favourably with that of his counterpart on this side of the Channel. And the number of agricultural labourers is after all considerable—possibly three times as great as the number in Britain. The contrast between their mode of life and that of the town population is too marked to permit of the supposition that they will be content to endure things as they are for ever.

The working-peasants are even more numerous, but, here again, an examination of their situation does not seem to suggest grounds for assuming that they either can or will remain resigned to a standard of living which is not only markedly inferior to other categories of the

population, but is subject to extreme vicissitude, and has exhibited a tendency spread over the lives of several generations to go from bad to worse.

There are of course the so-called middle peasants, working their land for the most part themselves, but with the help of a good deal of hired labour. Their lot is naturally far less precarious, and doubtless many amongst them are inclined to accept things as they are, even if they grumble at the policy of the Government of the day, criticise the landlord if they happen to be tenants, and deplore the tendency of labourers to demand concessions in the matter of wages and working conditions.

But it must not be overlooked that even the middle farmers have suffered severely, especially of recent years during a period when agricultural prices have collapsed. Quite apart from the effects of the recent world-crisis on their incomes, they have many genuine grievances of longer standing. Like other sections of the rural population they suffer from the lack of adequate amenities which is now characteristic of the rural areas, nor do they find themselves in an advantageous position *vis-à-vis* the highly organised industrial and commercial enterprises which buy their produce and supply them with their agricultural requisites.

Nor is this class, though influential, very numerous. The number of farms over 25 acres in extent is all-told, little more than a million; only 114,000 are over 125 acres.

On the other hand there are large farmers and wealthy landowners, who, if their numbers are inconsiderable, are yet powerfully entrenched, and able to exert immense influence on agricultural policy. These are closely linked with the very commercial and industrial interests which control farmers' prices, and it will not be surprising if the

tendency, already discernible, for the great mass of agriculturists to dissociate themselves from policies accepted by the favoured few, becomes more and more marked in the immediate future. Examination of this process of differentiation must be left for a later chapter. Before proceeding to deal with the political movements amongst the peasantry, it is well to review, however, the important question of agricultural technique, and to consider to what extent France is abreast of, lags behind, or outdistances other countries, including our own, in respect of the material equipment necessary for the exploitation of the soil.



## CHAPTER III

### THE MEANS OF PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION

FRANCE IS WELL situated in the matter of climate. The season of growth is prolonged. Adverse factors such as frost, hail, excessive drought, and hurricanes are happily less serious than in many other parts of the globe. The soil is above the average in fertility. The agricultural population is laborious and not devoid of skill.

But Man is above all a tool-using animal. Without adequate means of production agriculture must languish. It remains to ascertain, therefore, how well or how badly equipped from the technical standpoint is the French peasantry to-day. It is proposed in the present chapter to review the actual technical resources which the cultivator has at his disposal in at least the most important branches of agricultural production, passing on to a consideration of transport questions and market and storage facilities, and finally to deal with the industries which supply the farmer with his implements, power, and other necessities.

It has here to be admitted that the information available, whether official or otherwise, leaves much to be desired. Between 1892 and 1929 nothing in the nature of a comprehensive inquiry into agricultural equipment was attempted. Even the inquiries in these two years leave many gaps which it would be desirable to fill in. Consequently the writer on agricultural problems is unduly handicapped and can only hope to cover his ground by gleaning scraps of information from a multiplicity of

sources, endeavouring as best he may to piece these together into a composite whole.

When Arthur Young undertook his celebrated travels in France one hundred and fifty years ago he found a state of agricultural development which he was obliged to contrast unfavourably in many ways with what he knew of his own country. In England the break-up of feudalism had been far more complete, the freedom enjoyed by landlords and their capitalist tenants to do what they willed with the land had enabled improvements to be effected which were out of the question in eighteenth-century France. Writing of the northern and central areas Young maintained that:

“Of this great portion of the richest and most fertile part of France, it is only an inconsiderable district, viz., the conquered province of Flanders and part of Artois, that are well cultivated. Hence it should appear that the institutions of the French Government have been unfavourable to agriculture, and indeed we shall find a confirmation of this remark in Alsace, another territory very well cultivated and also conquered. When we see some of the finest, deepest and most fertile loams that are to be met with in the world, such as those between Bernay and Elboeuf and parts of the Pays de Caux in Normandy, and the neighbourhood of Meaux in the Ile de France, destined to the common, barbarous course of, (1) fallow, (2) wheat, (3) spring corn, and the produce of this spring corn beneath contempt; the whole exertion and produce being seen in a crop of wheat, we must be convinced that agriculture in such a kingdom is on the same footing as in the tenth century.”

Doubtless there are directions in which the development of technical progress in farming is further advanced in France than it is here; speaking generally, however, the

reverse is the case. Despite the partial agrarian revolution which was carried through in France within a year or two of Arthur Young's visit, and which has no counterpart in our own history, it is the country where large landed estates predominate, not the country where great numbers of the peasantry have direct access to the land, which is now leading in agricultural technique.

The fact of the matter is that division of the land could go too far. Even under nineteenth-century conditions it did not allow of the individual farmer being in a sufficiently big way of business to be able to provide himself with the various technical resources then becoming available. With the further revolutionary changes in technique which we have witnessed within our own lifetime the disadvantageous situation of the 'small man' is the more accentuated. But at this stage it becomes evident that even the bigger-sized English farms are no longer able to keep abreast of the times, and the visitor from overseas who expects to find here harvester-combines and high-powered tractors such as have become common in the United States, the Argentine and other areas of large-scale production, is usually disappointed.

According to the census figures of 1931 the number of farms in France, classified in respect of the degree in which they employ hired labour, was as follows:

No hired labour	.	.	.	1,341,112
1 to 5 labourers	.	.	.	1,048,715
6 to 10 „	.	.	.	23,885
11 to 20 „	.	.	.	5,754
21 to 50 „	.	.	.	2,190
51 to 100 „	.	.	.	240
101 to 200 „	.	.	.	33
Over 500 „	.	.	.	1

Total      2,421,930

Under the conditions which obtained on the Canadian wheat-belt in its palmiest days the fact that little hired labour was employed on a particular farm did not necessarily mean that up-to-date machinery was not being used. Europe is different in this respect. A farmer who has not the wherewithal to engage much labour certainly is in no position to equip himself with an expensive assortment of mechanical implements. The foregoing table therefore affords considerable enlightenment as to the reason why, in existing economic circumstances, French agriculture has come to lag behind Great Britain in the matter of agricultural technique. For, to judge by the amount of hired labour employed, only a small fraction of the total number of farms are of a size which would enable their occupiers to go in extensively for machinery and meet the cost out of their earnings. That there is a close relationship between the size of undertaking and the value of the machinery and other means of production employed is shown by the results of an enquiry made in England in 1923. The following table shows the position:

Size of Holding Acres	Production per acre	Production per Man
1-50	£11 . 19 . 9	£168 . 19 . 0
50-100	9 . 19 . 2	156 . 2 . 0
100-150	7 . 19 . 1	189 . 0 . 0
150-250	7 . 5 . 8	222 . 12 . 0
Over 250	8 . 4 . 4	316 . 19 . 0 <sup>1</sup>

While this table indicates that small farms are cultivated more intensively than large farms (since the money-value of the output per acre is greater on the former), it also shows that machinery must be used to a progressively greater extent as the farms get bigger. Were this not so there would be no accounting for the markedly higher earning power

<sup>1</sup> *Agriculture*, by Pointing and Burns. Labour Res. Dept., 1927.

of the worker on the large farm as compared with men employed on more modest undertakings.

It is understandable, therefore, that in France the development of technique has been conditioned, and to a considerable extent arrested, by the small size of the bulk of the farm-holdings.

Since almost all agriculturists strive to grow cereals either for their own consumption or as food for their animals, even if they have no thought for producing a surplus for the market, cereal-production is bound to be a branch of agriculture in which the low average of technical equipment is particularly evident. And this is certainly the case.

On May 1st, 1936, the following were the areas sown to the principal cereal-crops:

Wheat	.	.	.	5,144,180	hectares
Mixed Corn	.	.	.	69,080	„
Rye	.	.	.	661,790	„
Barley	.	.	.	724,500	„
Oats	.	.	.	3,325,260	„
Total				9,924,810	„

In round figures this represents an area of twenty-five million acres. It is only where large-scale farming prevails that the various operations entailed in corn-production are performed with modern equipment. Such areas are mainly round Paris and in the north. A case is quoted in a recent work<sup>1</sup> of a large farm attached to a sugar-factory in the Eure, where the entire ploughing and sowing of a field of wheat was performed in a single operation.

Formerly the same work was carried out by bullock-traction in four distinct operations, viz: ploughing, manuring, sowing, and harrowing. This method involved eleven

<sup>1</sup> *Pauvre Français!* p. 71, Fustier, Paris, 1936.

days of human labour and nineteen days of ox labour. The present method is to hitch four implements behind one and the same tractor, and in this way two men, including the driver of the tractor, are sufficient to complete the combined operation at the rate of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres a day.

But in France it is estimated that there is only one tractor for every 2,500 acres of arable land, and it is obvious, therefore, that such methods, which save labour and at the same time take full advantage of periods of fine weather, can only be applied to a limited extent. Even more rare is it to find the harvester-combine at work, though these are not uncommon in French North Africa. A combine cuts a 6-metre lane through the standing corn, harvesting anything from 35 to 60 acres daily. This represents an output in threshed grain of 350-400 quintals for a ten hour day. When the crop is particularly good an even higher figure is reached. The labour involved is that of one driver, one greaser, and a man to set the blades. In addition a team of six men deals with the sacking of the grain. In France itself, however, only about a hundred of these combines were in use as recently as 1929. Where they are employed the total labour time expended in producing a quintal of wheat is estimated to amount to only one-fourth of one man's working day, this covering the whole period from ploughing to the final sacking of the grain. The estimate is based on results obtained on a very large farm near Soissons. On the same farm, when the combine was not in use, the equivalent labour expenditure was .35 of a man's day. When less modern methods are used the expenditure of labour is of course progressively greater. Thus on a farm at Royan, where both horses and a tractor were in use, 564 quintals of corn were produced from 28.2 hectares. The expenditure in this case was .37 man-days. Again on a holding in Brittany, on easily worked

land, where horses are used, but little machinery, the corresponding figure was ·875 man-days. On a *métairie* of 75 acres in the Mayenne department, where horses are in use, a whole day of man's labour is required to produce a quintal of wheat. In the Tarn on a small farm using oxen the human labour employed worked out at 1·7 days.<sup>1</sup>

In the processing of wheat into flour the position is somewhat different. Little milling is now done on the farm and only a few peasants here and there cling to the practice of grinding corn by hand. A very large percentage of the milling is centred in the big cities, and more particularly round Paris. The equipment in the bigger mills is of a very modern type.<sup>2</sup> The combined total of windmills and watermills still in use in 1934 was only 8,628 or roughly one per every four communes. Mills using other sources of energy such as steam, electricity, etc., numbered 8,422. One of the measures recently taken to combat over-production was to forbid the establishment of any further flour mills.

Exception has also been taken to the increase in the number of bakeries, and a bill was introduced at the end of 1935 to limit them. One of the arguments brought forward was that in the department of the Seine alone 689 new bakeries were opened in the five years 1929-1934, and that these, added to 3,156 previously in existence, far exceeded the needs of the population.

As matters are to-day it can be said that France is well-equipped in regard to the milling of wheat and other cereals, but that only a small percentage of the land under cereal crops is cultivated with the aid of modern machinery.

<sup>1</sup> Examples quoted by R. Dumont in *Misère ou Prospérité Paysanne?*

<sup>2</sup> The consortium of the big millers control mills whose capacity is 6,000 tons a day out of 20,000 tons for the whole country.

With regard to the production of wine, one of the most important industries in the country, the application of modern technique is even less widespread than is the case with cereal production. This applies to processing as well as to field-cultivation.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the milling of wheat or rye by hand is now rare, a very large proportion of the grapes are still pressed by hand; an extremely laborious process. Vineyards in France, in contrast to Algeria, are usually of a respectable age, and the rows were formerly planted too close together to permit of inter-row cultivation and weeding being done by tractors, although certain narrow-model types are now available.

Probably the commonest type of equipment on the majority of the smaller holdings is such as would include a light single-furrow horse plough, an extensible horse-drawn cultivator, a horse-drawn sprayer borne on the shoulders.

The number of up-to-date plants for making wine has increased greatly in recent years. The majority are co-operative enterprises.<sup>2</sup> In the Gard there is an establishment of ultra-modern type. Here 600,000 hectolitres of wine are produced annually. A pipe-line connects the vats with the railway, so that wine can be pumped direct into specially-constructed containers. This factory has recently installed plant which can convert red into white wine or the pink wine known as rosé.<sup>3</sup> The whole plant is run by two vatmen, four specialists, and four chemists.

Cellarage in many parts of the country is provided by the caves dug out of the chalk and limestone escarpments.

In the sphere of distribution a good deal of the trade in wine is in the hands of large firms. One of these, the

<sup>1</sup> Of a total vintage of 73 million hectolitres in 1935—23·5 million were made on the farm.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter V.

<sup>3</sup> In 1935 about 19 per cent of the total vintage consisted of white wines.



*Etablissements Nicolas* declared a profit of 6½ million francs in 1935 and has no less than 304 depots spread all over the country.

Dairying in France is essentially a matter of small-scale farming. In certain parts of the country there has been a notable development of co-operative creameries for the production of butter or cheese, or both. Except for this the small farmers possess little in the way of dairying equipment and sell their milk to commercial dairies and distributors.

A few large firms such as Hauser, Fermiers Réunis, and Maggi practically monopolise the distribution of milk in the Paris area. The last-named alone furnishes 800,000 of the 1,200,000 litres consumed daily.

France, however, is noted for the quality both of its butter and its cheese. There were, in 1934, in all 6,427 dairying establishments in the country, about a third of them being situated in the South-East between the Rhône-Saône corridor and the frontier. If the value of butter and cheese produced is added to that of fresh milk the combined dairying industry ranks second only to wheat in order of importance, with an estimated output of 10,000,000,000 francs.

Similarly production of meat is not carried on under as favourable conditions as obtain elsewhere and is little rationalised. M. Brailant observes:

“Meat production imposes heavy charges on the French peasant: summer grazing on pasture which is only productive at the expense of much time and money, wintering under shelter, storage of feeding stuffs, stall-feeding, etc., etc.”

A tax on slaughtering was first imposed in 1927, and it is only since that date that reliable figures of meat

consumption for the whole of France are available. In 1928 consumption was estimated at 1,452,000 tons, in 1933 it had shrunk to 1,318,000 tons. Some quarter of a million tons of meat are imported annually. But in 1935 there was again a rise in consumption to 1,524,000 tons, of which:

Beef	.	.	.	.	.	639,000 tons.
Veal	.	.	.	.	.	314,000 „
Imported beef and veal	.	.	.	.	.	13,000 „
Mutton	.	.	.	.	.	94,000 „
Pork	.	.	.	.	.	417,000 „
Horse	.	.	.	.	.	47,000 „
Total	.	.	.	.	.	1,524,000 „

A number of the large towns have modern abattoirs, but side by side with these individual butchers have their own slaughter-yards, many of which are scarcely hygienic. Some 360 wholesalers practically monopolise the distribution of meat in the Parisian area. The general picture, however, is one of backward technique both in the sphere of production and in that of distribution.

There is no big meat canning industry in France, the total number of establishments of this nature being 170, with a modest output.

The preponderant role of the Capital in the consumption of meat is brought out by the following figures of the yield from slaughter-tax in various centres in 1934 (in francs):

Paris	.	.	.	.	.	63,192,000
Lille	.	.	.	.	.	2,786,000
Lyon	.	.	.	.	.	9,592,000
Bordeaux	.	.	.	.	.	4,814,000
Marseille	.	.	.	.	.	9,067,000
Nantes	.	.	.	.	.	1,720,000

Poultry-raising represents a highly important branch of French agriculture. There are however few directions in which modern scientific methods are less in evidence. In fact only about one-twentieth of the total production comes from specialised farming. Ninety-five per cent of production is carried on as an ancillary to general farming. Most poultry is consumed fresh, and consequently there is no large processing industry, as opposed to primary production on the farm. In 1934, for example, only some 2,000 tons of poultry found their way into cold-storage. There were, however, in that year about 50 million eggs put into cold-storage. In addition nearly five times the quantity were preserved by other methods, but these require no elaborate equipment and can be carried out with almost equal facility on small holdings as on large. The capacity of existing plant for the reception of eggs in cold-storage is estimated to be 100 million eggs, while an equal number can be dealt with by the cold-storage plants of a non-specialised character.<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that the circumstance that almost the whole of poultry-production in France is non-specialised results in great loss of efficiency. Greater production could be achieved along three main lines, namely improvement of stock by selection under expert direction, the provision of better types of shelter, and more scientific feeding.

One of the principal obstacles to progress is the relatively poor price obtained by the farmer in contrast to the cost to the consumer. The annual report of the National Confederation for Commerce and Industry for the year 1935 gives the following analysis of the retail-prices of poultry and eggs:

<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the *Assemblée Permanente des Présidents des Chambres de l'Agriculture*, p. 505, for the year 1936.

Share of (per cent):

	<i>Importer or Producer</i>	<i>Taxes</i>	<i>Transport</i>	<i>Various</i>	<i>Retailer</i>
Chickens	62	9·7	2	11	15·3
Eggs	62·2	6	2	13·1	16·7

These figures indicate the position as it was in 1934. When prices rise above the level of that year the proportion taken by the producer would tend to rise. On the other hand prices for a time actually fell after these calculations had been made, and it was estimated that while that was the case the producer's share of the ultimate selling-price had sunk to only a half. It is interesting to note that consumption of eggs dropped steadily during the period of the collapse in prices. The average price per 1,000 of eggs in Picardy in 1930 was 804 francs. In that year the consumption in Paris was 28·9 million kilos. Three years later the Picardy price had fallen to 591 francs, and the consumption in Paris to 25·6 million kilos, a drop in the latter instance of about 12 per cent.

As is the case with poultry so also with fruit and vegetables. In the main they are grown by the small man who is unable to avail himself of the latest advances in technique. Here and there, however, particularly in the regions where vegetables are raised for early market, and, on occasion, as field-crops, machinery of a more elaborate type is coming to be used. It is probable that a set back has been caused by the virtual closing of the English market to French vegetables in the last few years. According to the bulletin of the 'Custos' Agency of January 5th, 1936, the total imports into England of fresh vegetables from France were less than 100,000 quintals in 1934 as against 545,537 in 1931. This was of course due to the rapid expansion of British home cultivation behind the new tariff walls. The British Ministry of Agriculture's

estimate of average production for the market between 1930 and 1932 was 1,500,000 tons excluding potatoes and tomatoes and not taking into account a further 470,000 tons grown for domestic consumption. It is well known also that miserably low prices have been obtained by vendors recently on the Paris market, a consequence mainly of the prevailing lack of organisation in this branch of production.

In 1934 there were 230 factories exclusively devoted to the canning of vegetables, and 182 to the canning of fruit. In addition there were 205 factories making jam. The latter is an article of diet which is consumed in far smaller quantities in France than is the case here.

The most valuable of those agricultural products which find their way in the first instance to the factory instead of going direct to the consumer is sugar beet. Some 700,000 acres of beet are grown to be manufactured into sugar and about 125,000 acres for distillation. The cultivation of sugar beet in northern and eastern France is carried on under conditions somewhat different from those obtaining in England.

"The Atlantic countries include South Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and northern France. Some parts of these countries are drier and some wetter than Great Britain, their respective rainfalls vary from 21 to 32 inches, but the general conditions in all of them resemble ours more closely. Sugar beet is grown almost exclusively on soils either naturally rich or in good heart, and only exceptionally is it cultivated on light, sandy, soil."<sup>1</sup>

Artificial manures<sup>2</sup> are used in beet cultivation to a greater extent in France than here, and another difference

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Agriculture Bulletin, No. 102.

<sup>2</sup> But in 1935 in the Nord department it was officially stated that the use of artificial fertiliser had, as a measure of economy, been reduced by 70 per cent.

is that the tops are invariably used for fodder and are never ploughed in. Cultivation is more intensive than in Great Britain, and more plants are grown to the acre. Messrs. Rayns and Wright give the following counts of plant population obtained in some experimental plots:

		<i>Theoretical</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Percentage of Possible</i>
Northern France . . .	.	31,360	29,160	93
„ „ . . .	.	32,360	31,600	96
England . . .	.	36,200	26,260	72
„ . . .	.	29,860	28,240	95
„ . . .	.	31,830	27,650	87

Due to the factors already mentioned combined with others the yield from a given area is generally higher in France than in this country.

Sugar beet is grown mostly by big or medium farmers, and sometimes by the factories themselves. Thus, unlike many other crops, its cultivation is conducted along up-to-date lines, involving the use of modern and specialised implements. A case in point is a beet cultivator which made its appearance in 1935 and is directly fixed to the tractor. By this means it is possible to hoe twenty or twenty-five acres of beet in a day, six rows being taken at a time.

There are only 102 sugar factories in the country of which eight are owned co-operatively by the growers. The average output is about 8,000 tons a season per factory which is from 75 to 80 per cent of their capacity. To a great extent these powerful industrial undertakings finance the beet farmers, but the latter in their turn are now well organised professionally, with the result that contracts have of recent years been more favourable to growers than was the case formerly.

It is doubtless partly due to their organisation that growers of sugar beet are provided with an auxiliary market for a part of their crop. This is the governmental alcohol monopoly, which purchases from the distillers of beet, wine, potato, and other spirits a large quantity of alcohol every year of which about four fifths are mixed with petrol and used as motor spirit. For a proportion of this alcohol the State pays as much as 225 francs per 100 litres, a price many times in excess of the price of petrol.

The State also intervenes in tobacco cultivation. Its interest here is entirely pecuniary, tobacco being one of the principal sources of revenue of the State budget. Only a certain proportion of the tobacco consumed is grown in the country. In 1934 the figures were:

<i>Tobacco in Leaf</i>	<i>Quantity</i> (kilogrammes)	<i>Value</i> (francs)
Home grown . . . .	39,545,092	284,336,843
Imported . . . . .	27,834,000	155,647,000

From these figures it is interesting to learn that the French cultivator receives a rather higher price than that ruling on the world market. Tobacco manufacture is carried on in France by the State itself. A State licence is also required to grow tobacco. The 48,000 holdings on which it is grown are confined to thirty six departments. The yield per hectare is usually about 2 tons, and since the average size of an individual plantation is in the region of two sevenths of a hectare (about three quarters of an acre), the average output per plantation would be about twelve hundredweight.

The retailing of tobacco is also carried on under licence, and the privilege of being a licence holder is one much sought after.

Reference has already been made in Chapter I to the decline in silk-production. Nevertheless France still remains an important manufacturer of silk, the centre of the industry being at Lyon. The syndicate of silk-spinners embraces 126 factories with 825,000 spindles, the Lyon silk-weavers' organisation 189, owning 153,131 looms.

In the matter of transport French agriculture enjoys the benefit of one of the best systems in the world. France has an excellent system of navigable inland waterways, consisting partly of rivers and partly of canals. There were in 1932 6,190 miles of such waterways. They are used to a much greater extent than is the case on the canals in Great Britain, and provide an extremely cheap means of transport for heavy and bulky goods. This is the case more especially when horse-traction is employed, and a decree of March, 1935, which made mechanical traction obligatory on the Rhine-Marne canal was vigorously opposed in many quarters. It was claimed that where charges of 5.50 to 8 francs per kilometre ruled for mechanical traction, horse-traction cost only 2 francs. Agriculture undoubtedly derives considerable benefit from the excellence of the inland water-transport system.

The railway-system is also extensive, and, on the whole, technically efficient. There are some 26,000 miles of standard gauge, and about 14,000 miles of narrow gauge and local lines. Overhead charges on account of construction, etc., must be considerably lower than in Great Britain. This is mainly due to successive devaluations of the franc. Apart from the State-owned lines, which were taken over before the War, the non-recurring expenditure on the railways, according to a statement of the Minister of Transport, had, by the end of 1934, reached the following totals (in millions of francs):



## Chargeable to

<i>System</i>	<i>The State</i>	<i>Local Authorities</i>	<i>Companies</i>	<i>Total</i>
Nord. .	78	128	8,220	8,426
Est . .	1,550	62	6,179	7,791
Paris-Orleans	1,566	49	7,074	8,689
P. L. M. .	2,549	63	12,178	14,790
Midi. .	1,091	21	4,829	5,941
	6,834	323	38,480	45,637

Considering the total mileage involved the figure of 45.6 milliards is very moderate. At the present rate of exchange it is equivalent roughly to £450,000,000, which is probably less than a third of the market value of British railway stock. But the greater part of this expenditure was incurred when the gold-content of the franc was seven times what it is to-day. That being so it might be expected that the railways would be able to keep their charges low, and thus encourage their full utilisation. In fact that has not been the case: "Transport charges are enormous, in the case of livestock the average co-efficient is nine, and even nineteen on some lines. For pigs freight charges for long-distances represent anything up to 12 per cent of the price received by the farmer."<sup>1</sup>

The *rapporteur* of the Liquors Committee of the Chamber of Deputies declared in 1935 that the charges for wine-containers returning empty varied between thirteen and sixteen times the pre-war figures. In the case of casks the situation, he declared, was even worse, and quoted a case when 21 francs 65 centimes had been charged for the return from Béthune to Nîmes of a cask, which had cost 19 francs to send full of wine in the first instance!

Apart from the important section of the railway system already owned by the State, the remainder is owned and

<sup>1</sup> M. Braibant *D'Abord la Terre*, p. 47.

operated by five large companies under concessions which expire at various dates between 1950 and 1960. Although charges are high and tariffs complicated, it would be a mistake to conclude that the railways are incapable of giving efficient service by reason of any technical shortcomings. Such is far from being the case. Since the War many hundreds of miles of track have been electrified, and rolling-stock of all kinds has been modernised. For passenger-traffic there has been a notable development of diesel stream-lined cars on certain lines.

The needs of agriculture are well served, too, by the roads. France has always been renowned for the attention paid to the road system. The main roads have for long been kept up by the Central Government. In 1931 there were 49,809 miles of these *routes nationales* alone. M. Laurent-Eynac, minister of Public Works in the Flandin Government, stated that 15,000 workmen were employed on these roads, and an additional 10,000 in ancillary work such as quarrying, etc.

As might have been supposed, the same problem of co-ordination between road and rail has arisen in France as elsewhere. The development of rapid means of transport by road has undoubtedly drawn away much of the traffic that formerly went by rail. In the attempts that have been made to find a solution to the problem little success has so far been achieved. Most of the original proposals would seem to have unduly favoured road-transport, and involved the restriction of train services and even the closing down of branch lines. The organisations of the farmers have tended to view many of these proposals with a certain degree of suspicion, seeing in them not only a decision, too hastily arrived at, to deprive their members of valuable rail services, but also an attempt to limit their own free use of the roads in favour of commercial transport. The problem is extremely complicated

and would not appear likely to be solved in the near future on the basis of existing competitive conditions. What is abundantly clear, however, is that rail-transport charges are excessively high. They could be lowered if traffic were to be increased, but things have got into a vicious circle, since high transport charges are themselves a potent factor restricting the volume of traffic.

One difficulty, of course, is that they are not the only factor at work. A reduction in freight-rates would not in itself suffice to increase consumption (and therefore traffic) to the extent required. The factors which keep retail prices high are in fact very complex. Amongst them must be reckoned the large commissions taken by middlemen, wholesalers and others, who form often a longish link between producer and ultimate consumer. In the meat-trade there are for instance numbers of small buyers in the local provincial markets who sell to bigger men, who in turn freight livestock on to the great Villette market at Paris. Here again animals may change hands before they are finally acquired by the butcher for slaughter. The wheat market was, until the institution of the Grain Office in 1936, even more encumbered with various categories of dealers, each looking to gain a profit before reselling his grain to the next dealer, and so on in succession.

The markets of great cities have not been created according to a set plan. They have grown, with their innumerable customs and usages, from origins which are lost in the mists of time. Such is the case with the great London markets, Smithfield, Covent Garden, Spitalfields. Such is also the case with the Paris markets, above all with *Les Halles* :

“This market is not only the purveyor for Paris and its suburbs, where more than four million human beings must perforce come for their approvisionnement; it is also that of a large part of France and Belgium, the market

upon which the eyes of the small provincial towns and the country districts are set, diligently following that astonishing phenomenon, omnipotent and awe-inspiring, which goes under the name of "Halles prices."<sup>1</sup>

Business at *Les Halles* is conducted by an extraordinary variety of middlemen, each category reserving to itself a particular sphere of activity:

"As well as the commission-agents, there are other dealers on margin. *Répartiteurs* for instance. These men are intermediaries entrusted by forwarding-agents with the job of distributing their merchandise to the best advantage between the different *mandataires* and commission-agents. Regarded by forwarding-agents as their business representatives they take a commission from that quarter. Regarded by commission-agents and *mandataires* as indispensable intermediaries in obtaining supplies they get a commission from these too. Thus they make something both ways, and see to it that their goods are placed with those who get the best price for them. In other words the *répartiteur's* job is to place his business with whoever is most successfully raising the cost of living.

"Then there are the *groupeurs*, transport-agents whose role resembles that of the *répartiteurs* and so on . . ."<sup>2</sup>

The basis of the middleman's activity is largely deficiency in the provision of adequate warehousing and storage accommodation at the disposal of the producer on the one hand, and of the retail-trader, or the manufacturer as the case may be, on the other. Producers who lack the necessary accommodation cannot keep produce which is often of a perishable nature indefinitely until a favourable opportunity occurs to sell. On the other hand a retail-trader or a manufacturer does not wish to carry larger stocks than he feels he can dispose of within a reasonable

<sup>1</sup> *Les Usines de la Vie Chère* ; a series of articles which appeared in the evening newspaper *Ce Soir* between April 20th and 25th, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*

period. In the case of perishable goods the shopkeeper may lack the necessary cold-storage installation.

The general impression presented is one of lack of sufficient organisation in the handling of agricultural produce in bulk. This is a field in which great improvements could undoubtedly be effected and it is noteworthy that an insistent demand of organised agriculture at the present time is for the provision of adequate facilities for storing grain, the construction of new silos all over the country which shall be under the control of the farmers themselves. It is probable that the interests of agriculture would also be served were the various problems involved in the storage of other kinds of agricultural produce, as for instance meat and meat products, fruit and vegetables, to be subjected to intensive study from a comprehensively national angle.

The renewal of the fertility of the soil in France is encompassed by a variety of agencies. In the first place the wealth of the country in livestock assures a constant supply of animal manure. In a monograph on agriculture in the Calvados department in Normandy, published in 1908, M. Edmond Michel gives the following estimate of the quantity of animal manure available yearly for the whole country. His figures have probably still some value. In millions of tons M. Michel estimated the contribution of the various species of farm animal as:

Horse	.	.	.	.	.	13
Mule	.	.	.	.	.	·78
Ass	.	.	.	.	.	·81
Cattle	.	.	.	.	.	51·68
Sheep	.	.	.	.	.	9·39
Pig	.	.	.	.	.	6·94
Goat	.	.	.	.	.	·51

Total . . . 83·15

In some of the areas adjacent to the sea, as for example in La Vendée, Southern Brittany, and the Cotentin, marine fertilisers are extensively used. But no agricultural economy in these days can dispense with artificial fertilisers to supplement whatever natural manures may be available. France, partly on account of her leading military position, is in the front rank in regard to the production of artificial fertilisers of all kinds.

According to M. Edouard Bernard, a leading authority on the subject, the capacity of the French nitrate industry was already by 1932 in excess of 1,600,000 tons. This is far beyond the quantity actually being produced. Indeed by reason of the high prices ruling in the fertiliser market the consumption of nitrates is lower in France than in many other countries. In 1929 the average consumption in Japan and Germany was 150 per cent higher (at 20 kilos per hectare) than it was in France which only used 8 kilos per hectare of arable land. One of the largest plants in the country for the production of synthetic nitrogen is owned by the State. It is situated at Toulouse. Owing to the competition of several private firms the Toulouse plant cannot normally be run at full capacity, with the result that the cost of production is inevitably increased.

The capacity for the production of cyanamide of factories then working was estimated in 1926 to be:

<i>Factory</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Capacity (tons)</i>
Bellegarde . . .	Ain . . . . .	25,000
Launomezan . . .	Hautes Pyrénées . .	45,000
Kuhlmann-Brignond .	Isère . . . . .	30,000
Marignac . . . . .	Haute Garonne . .	30,000
Modane . . . . .	Savoie . . . . .	15,000

At that date the combined output of these plants was about 60,000 tons.

In North Africa French interests control extremely valuable sources for the supply of natural phosphates. Superphosphates are extensively used in French agriculture. In 1931, nearly two million tons of this fertiliser were employed, but consumption fell by a third at the height of the crisis in 1935-36.

With the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France at the close of the Great War, the potash deposits of Alsace, which are amongst the richest in the world, became the property of the French Government. The consumption of pure potash attained a total of 235,000 tons in 1929-30 but dropped to only 145,000 tons in 1935.

Despite the important part played by the State itself in the production of agricultural fertilisers, the industry is largely controlled by monopolistic enterprise, and the demand is frequently put forward by agricultural interests that it should be placed under State control in order to ensure that the requirements of agriculture are met at prices such as the farming community can afford to pay.

The principal centre for the manufacture of concentrates for the feeding of livestock is Marseilles. Before the War Marseilles was the leading producer of oil and cake throughout the world. Imports of oil-bearing seeds, nuts etc. to supply the industry have attained large dimensions. In 1913 total imports under this head already exceeded 1,000,000 tons. In 1934 1,300,000 tons were imported. Imports of manufactured concentrates in that year were in the region of but 90,000 tons. It would appear, therefore, that from the technical point of view France is well equipped for the manufacture of concentrates, but that the industry is largely dependent nowadays on imports for its raw materials. Reference has already been made

in Chapter I to the decline in the cultivation of linseed, rape, and other plants used in cake manufacture.

The greatest concentration of plant-nurseries is to be found in the lower valleys of the Loire and the Rhone. In the Maine-et-Loire department there were in 1934 3,670 hectares of nursery land yielding a production valued at over 12 million francs. At the same date four departments in the Rhone valley (Vaucluse, Gard, Drôme and Bouches-du-Rhône) produced over 19 million francs' worth of nurseryman's products from an area of 2,350 hectares. Other important centres are the Paris region and the Nord department. Throughout the whole country the production of the plant-nurseries was estimated in 1934 at 165 million francs. The importation of seed and seedlings has in recent years been very moderate. In regard to seed and seedlings French agriculture can therefore be regarded as being independent of foreign supplies. The industry is not so highly concentrated as the production of fertilisers. Essentially it is one in which individual human skill still counts for more than the machine. It is possible to obtain satisfactory results with relatively inexpensive equipment; consequently the factors which favour rapid concentration of production in a few hands are not present, and the industry may be regarded as one in which medium-scale enterprise still predominates.

The production of agricultural implements and machinery at one time occupied third place in the metal industry, ranking next in importance to that of motor cars. In 1930 the volume of business done was valued at two milliard francs, which was at the time the equivalent of £16,000,000. The repercussions of the agricultural crisis are plainly evident in the corresponding figure for 1934, when only



600 million francs' worth of agricultural machinery was sold.

Of the vicissitudes which the industry has undergone in recent years M. Villard, a prominent member of the manufacturers' organisation, writes as follows:

"In 1914 the production of agricultural machinery in France reached a total of 120 to 140 millions of francs' worth of goods, as compared with 45 million francs of imports and an export figure of approximately 15 millions.

"By way of comparison it is to be noted that motor car production was to the value of 500 million francs, imports 20 million francs and exports 500 million francs. For railway material the corresponding figures were 200, 23, and 7 million.

"The number of firms specialising in agricultural machine construction was about 400, not taking into account an almost equal number of small businesses employing from one to five workmen and also undertaking sales and repairs.

"An approximate estimate of the number of workmen employed in factories and workshops specialising in agricultural machinery at that time would be 20,000.

"Before the war the industry was subjected to fierce foreign competition, American, Canadian, and German in particular.

"In 1914 our agriculture, dependent on foreign sources of supply for a large part of its technical equipment, found itself deprived at one stroke of access to such sources.

"Only from 1920 onwards has the French agricultural machine trade begun to make rapid progress. In the post-war years the number of firms engaged in the production of agricultural machinery attained a total of about 550 made up as follows:

50	establishments	employing	from	100 to	500	workmen
80	"	"	"	35 to	100	"
170	"	"	"	10 to	35	"
250	"	"		less than	10	"

"There was a further increase up to 1930 a time of great activity in the industry, since when, however, a consistent decline has been registered. At that time the distribution of labour indicated a tendency towards concentration of the means of production; thus there were then:

15	establishments	employing	from	500	to	1,000	persons
25	"	"	"	200	to	500	"
125	"	"	"	50	to	200	"
480	"	"	"	5	to	50	"

"To these should be added about 500 firms of minor importance and a large number of smiths and repairers engaged in servicing work.

"From 1930 to 1932 the number of workers specialised in agricultural machine construction exceeded 35,000; more than 200,000 persons were directly or indirectly involved.

"In 1930 the number of machines of all descriptions manufactured by firms operating in France was about 1,200,000, representing an approximate weight of 200,000 tons, almost double the pre-war figure.

"At the present time, in consequence of the slowing down of economic activity, French industry is employing only some 15,000 specialised workers and provides work for about 100,000 people, agents, distributors, servicing staffs, artisans who depend on the industry.

"The establishments engaged in the production of agricultural machinery are distributed throughout the entire country—the majority being of the artisan type and employing under present conditions from ten to forty workers. Important centres exist however in the centre (Vierzon, Bourges), the East, the North, at Paris, Cherbourg, Toulouse and Bordeaux."

In 1928 the value of imported agricultural machinery reached very near the two-million-pound mark, but as a result of new tariff measures it has since fallen greatly. By 1934 the value of such imports did not exceed £500,000.

Most types of farming require a good water-supply. Vineyards and orchards have to be sprayed, vegetables watered during dry periods. Livestock needs water to drink. Although many parts of the country have abundant natural supplies of water this is by no means always the case. Vast stretches of limestone—the *champagnes*—are comparatively waterless. Of a total of about 34,000 rural communes 7,515 sought and obtained between 1910 and 1935 grants from the State in order to instal a supply of drinking-water. Probably more than half the communes still lack an adequate supply, and of course in many instances the supply is not available in outlying farms. A piped water-supply is still lacking on a vast number of farms where water, whether for drinking-purposes or farm-operations, has still to be drawn by hand from wells and ponds and carried considerable distances in pails.

Broadly-speaking the power used in farming falls into three categories; power used in cultivation, power used in transport, and power employed in and about the farm in processing and in sundry minor ways. The oldest form of power is Man's own labour. It is still used to an enormous extent in French farming, not only in the cultivation of the land and harvesting but even for transport. The use of handcars of one kind or another is no uncommon sight. Often even the handcart or barrow is dispensed with and the backs of peasant men and women are as a consequence prematurely bowed from carrying heavy loads on the shoulders.

To some extent water-power is still used in agriculture, mostly for milling grain. Wind-power is often utilised for pumping, and also for milling, but less so than formerly. But the most widely-used form of power to-day is animal power. Very few farms have no working animals at all, but a great many have only one or two. In Great Britain the

horse has no rival as the helpmate of the farmer but in France—or perhaps it would be truer to say in certain parts of France—the ox, the mule, and the ass are also used. The annual statistics do not differentiate between animals used for work and those kept for other purposes, but it is certain that a large proportion of the 1,345,940 head of oxen returned in 1934 were used for draught purposes.

The following table, based on official statistics, shows the trend of recent years in regard to the numbers of various kinds of animals kept mainly for work:

<i>Period</i>		<i>Horses</i>	<i>Mules</i>	<i>Asses</i>
Average	1901-10	3,125,327	198,250	361,180
„	1922-31	2,895,291	173,381	262,782
„	1928-32	2,933,240	148,516	227,910
1933		2,878,380	130,340	223,100
1934		2,837,750	125,780	219,760
1935		2,810,000	123,020	210,590

It would appear from this table that the mule and the ass are tending to disappear very rapidly, but that the horse is less easily dispensed with. The number of young horses (in 1934 there were 505,150 under three years of age out of a total of 2,837,750) would seem to confirm this. The best-known breed of oxen is the Charolais, which is extensively employed on beet cultivation and is finally fattened on the beet-tops when too old to work before being sold for slaughter.

The State takes a lively interest in horse-breeding, horses being still a necessity for the army. One of the principal sections of the Ministry of Agriculture is that concerned with horse-breeding. The Government owns a large number of sires and awards prizes to private owners of stud animals from a fund to which a proportion of the State's share in the Totalisator profits is devoted.

The substitution in the processes of production of animal, wind, and water-power in place of human muscular energy represented a great advance. Such innovations as the horse-collar were largely responsible for the abolition of serfdom which was taking place in Western Europe from the eleventh century onwards. But the economy of human effort was still comparatively small. It is doubtful, taking agriculture as a whole, if the *per capita* productivity of the human labourer was more than doubled in the period which elapsed between the reign of Charlemagne and the French Revolution.

The industrial revolution which resulted from the utilisation of steam as a source of energy did not fail to have its repercussions in the domain of agriculture. The most immediate results were to place at the disposal of the farmer for the first time an abundance of manufactured implements at a price within his means. At the same time the development of railways and steamship communication enlarged the agricultural market, though for the French farmer this again created new problems, since he was now to find himself in competition with overseas producers who were even more benefited by the new cheapness of transport than he was.

Progress actually realised in the utilisation of steam as a source of energy did not come as rapidly as is sometimes supposed. Thus in the forty-five years following the construction of James Watt's first successful steam-engine in 1775 only sixty-five stationary engines had been completed and installed in the whole of France. In the next ten years progress was rather more rapid: by 1830 625 engines were working, representing a total of 64,789 H.P. In 1860 the number of stationary steam engines had grown to 13,691, with a horse-power estimated at 169,166 units.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pauvre Français*. . . ! p. 30.

Steam-power was only brought onto the farms in comparatively recent times. In general it has proved rather too costly to be found really useful by the small and medium farmers, partly owing to the high initial cost, and also to the difficulty of obtaining cheap fuel. That steam-engines have only a limited utility on the farm, and cannot hold their own in these days of the cheap internal combustion engine, is proved by the figures relative to the numbers of fixed and portable steam-engines used on farms in England and Wales. It should be stated that the information supplied for the Census of Agricultural Production by farmers is voluntary and that therefore the figures given have only a comparative value. In 1908, 8,690 steam-engines were returned, in 1913, 7,719, in 1925, 3,731 and in 1931 at the last census only 2,246. There has thus been a decrease in twenty-three years of 74 per cent. Nevertheless steam is widely used as the motive power in threshing-machines, is used on large farms for cable-ploughing, and often for pumping and other purposes.

One of the difficulties with steam-engines from the farmer's point of view is the time required to raise steam for operations which, as often as not, can be performed in a few hours. The difficulty is less with gas engines, but these too have tended to make way for the internal combustion type. The Census of Production return for England and Wales give the following numbers of gas engines on farms:

1908	1913	1925	1931
921	1,287	1,125	645

The fact is that the farm has had to wait until the twentieth century to obtain new sources of energy. These have at length been provided by electricity and by the

internal combustion engine. It is these which are now revolutionising the practice of farming and between them are promising to multiply the productive capacity of the landworker to an almost unlimited degree. Quite apart from the utilisation of the internal combustion engine in farm-traction, the progress in the installation of power-producing plant on farms has been phenomenal. The Census of Production gives the following figures for stationary and portable electrical, oil, and petrol engines on the farms of England and Wales:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Electric</i>	<i>Oil and Petrol</i>
1908	146	6,911
1913	262	16,284
1925	700	56,744
1931	2,475	65,725

In less than a quarter of a century the number of oil and petrol engines had thus increased ten-fold, while the number of electric motors had increased in an even greater ratio. It is worth noting that the figures for 1931 relate to a date when the "grid" system had not yet been completed.

Like Great Britain, France now has its "grid":

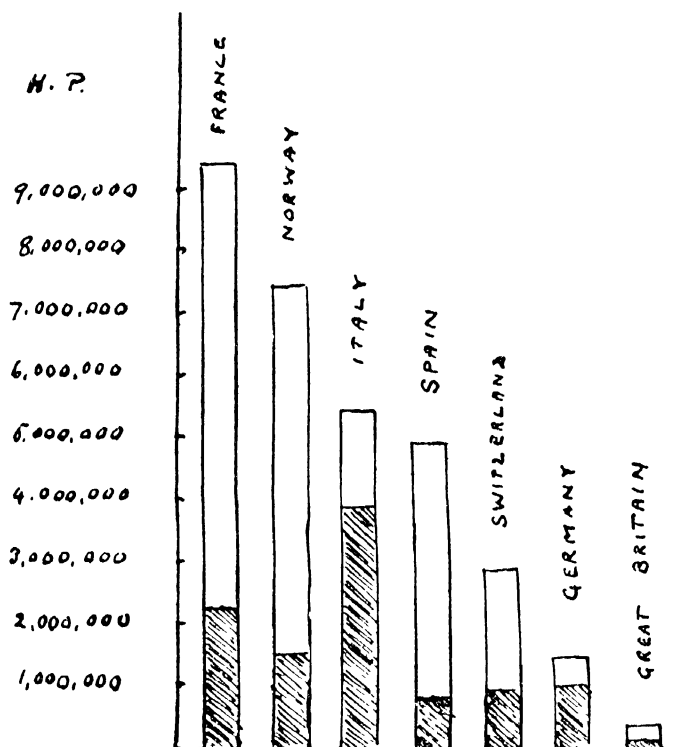
"Thanks to inter-connecting lines of 220,000 volts the electrical energy from the Alps and the Pyrenees can be utilised at all points throughout the entire country."<sup>1</sup>

France is exceptionally rich in waterfalls which can be harnessed for use in the generation of electricity. The diagram on the next page reveals the existence of potential resources exceeding those of even Norway and Italy, and beside which Great Britain's seem puny.

<sup>1</sup> *Pauvre Français* . . . ! p. 38.

ESTIMATED HYDRO-ELECTRIC RESOURCES OF VARIOUS COUNTRIES<sup>1</sup>

(Shaded portion represents potential of existing installations)



<sup>1</sup> From a report of the French Ministry of Commerce published in 1929 and reproduced in *Pauvre Français*.



A considerable part of these potential resources has already been made available. The progress in the construction of hydro-electric plants can be traced in the following table:

CAPACITY OF HYDRO-ELECTRIC AND HYDRAULIC  
UNDERTAKINGS IN FRANCE

<i>Year</i>	<i>H.P.</i>
1900 . .	500,000
1910 . .	1,225,000
1914 . .	1,450,000
1918 . .	1,700,000
1925 . .	2,700,000
1930 . .	3,500,000
1934 . .	4,500,000

In the period between the close of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of war in 1914 available hydro-electric power had practically trebled. Progress, arrested during the war years, was renewed as soon as peace was signed and within a period of sixteen years had once more nearly trebled. That is not to say that the whole of these immense resources are being utilised. At the deepest point of the crisis less than a third of the available resources were in actual use, and it is certain that agriculture contributed its full share to the drop in the consumption of current at that time.

Actually electricity is used for power purposes as a rule only on large farms, though indirectly thousands of middle and small farmers are benefiting from its use in processing-plants which they own co-operatively. On the other hand it is much commoner to find electricity used for lighting farm-buildings such as cow-sheds, stables, barns, etc., in France than in England. This is probably mainly by reason of the closer grouping of farms, which tend to be concentrated in villages in the former country,

and not spread over the countryside as they generally are in England. Consequently the cost of laying mains is reduced to a minimum.

The small internal combustion engine running on paraffin or petrol is capable of replacing muscular energy in an infinite number of ways and in almost all types of farming. The economy of effort is usually considerable. Thus, for instance, a root slicer worked by hand prepares from a ton to a ton-and-a-quarter of roots in an hour. A small 2 h.p. plant can deliver ten times the quantity in the same time. That this type of engine is a godsend to the farmer is obvious. The numbers actually in use are, however, severely restricted owing to the prevailing lack of capital at the disposal of the peasant farmer. It is doubtful, too, if they could really compete economically with electric motors were current to be supplied at reasonable rates. So far there has been room for their employment largely because the cost of current in rural areas is exceptionally high. Indeed it was maintained as recently as 1926, in a paper read before the *Institut National Agronomique*, that it was impossible to induce commercial interests to undertake schemes for the supply of electricity to farmers unless they were assured that they would be able to obtain a considerable percentage of industrial customers as well. There would not, however, appear to be any inherent reason why the cost of electric current should not in future be cheapened considerably, since the overwhelming bulk of the supply is generated by water-power which in the long run is far less costly than coal.

American farmers led the way in utilising the motor car as a means of getting to market, and saving thereby considerable time on the double journey. The practice quickly spread to Europe but it is very doubtful whether as large a proportion of farmers own motor cars in France

as do so in England. Yet in France there is now a motor car to every nineteen inhabitants as against one to every twenty-three in Great Britain. These motor cars are, however, owned mostly by other categories of the population. On a recent occasion, taking a walk on market day in the neighbourhood of Bayeux in Normandy, in a region where medium-scale farming is predominant, I noticed that the great majority of the farmers on the road were still driving their old-fashioned gigs. Few seemed to possess cars. Naturally for transporting crops, manure, etc., over rough ground horse-carts are still almost universally used, since the ordinary motor car, lorry, or van is ill-adapted for the purpose.

But for actual field-work the tractor on the larger farms has made headway. It is far less extensively used in France than here, where there is a tractor to every 125 acres of arable land. In the United States there is one to 375 acres, in Canada one to 560 acres, in Italy one to 1,060 acres and in the Soviet Union (at the end of 1936) one to the thousand acres of arable. France has only about 20,000 agricultural tractors all told which is equivalent to one per 2,500 acres. The explanation lies of course in the small average size of agricultural holdings, for it is only on holdings of a fair size that the tractor is an economic proposition, or the farmer likely to be able to purchase one for that matter. This is abundantly clear from the distribution of tractors on farms in England and Wales, of which details are given in the last Census of Production. On the farms between 1 and 50 acres which made returns, only 1,287 had tractors. Farms between 50 and 150 acres to the number of 3,543 possessed tractors, and tractors were being used on 9,651 of the farms of over 150 acres.

It should be borne in mind, however, that standard models of tractor are not always utilisable in certain

branches of agriculture, as in the older vineyards where the rows are planted too close together to permit of the ordinary tractor getting between them.

Tracklaying tractors are not as yet widely used, nor have Diesel-engined models, although extremely economical in the matter of fuel, yet established themselves even on the largest farms.

Deficient in many respects as we have seen the technical equipment of agriculture to be in the spheres both of production and distribution, the output even so attains imposing proportions. This is largely because the peasant population is distinguished for its extreme laboriousness, and hardly less by an almost unlimited capacity to make the most of its opportunities, however limited these may be. So much so that the value of the agricultural output represents a very high percentage of the national turnover. Speaking at the Lille Business Fair in 1936, M. Emanuel Lauthiez, president of the Chamber of Agriculture of the Nord department, one of the richest agricultural regions in the country, gave some illuminating figures regarding the importance of agricultural production.

"In 1929," observed M. Lauthiez, "a year of currency stabilisation and average production, the value of agricultural production in France reached 115 milliard francs.<sup>1</sup> At that time the total national income was 225 milliards. Agriculture's share therefore attained to 45 per cent of the sum-total of French production.

"Vegetable products were valued at 75 milliards, animal products at 35 milliards, and other products at about 5 milliards. The wheat-crop was worth 10 milliards, equivalent in value to the entire metallurgical production. Oats, 6 milliards, balanced with the production of the automobile industry (which then employed 380,000 workers). Wine-production was of a value of

<sup>1</sup> Approximately £935,000,000 at the then rate of exchange.

6 milliards (in 1932, 1933, 1934) the same as coal. In 1929 our wine realised 9,981,081,720 francs, milk 12 milliards, which was double the combined figure of the electrical and silk industries (electrical goods 4 milliards, silk 2 milliards); meat made available for consumption had an even higher value—15 milliards.”

The speaker went on to refer to the enormous decline in the value of agricultural produce, and to utter a warning as to the danger to the whole economy of the country which might be its result:

“To go back, bear in mind that in 1929 the total value of the products of French agriculture was 115 milliards. In 1934 the figures drop to: vegetable products 49,276,520,123 francs; animal and various, 26 milliards. Total 75 milliards. Hence a drop in receipts of about 40 milliards. These figures, a little worrying, but woefully correct, need to be borne in mind. They bring out the fact that on our agriculture’s well-being, on this margin of some dozens of milliards which it may or may not be able to put into circulation, depends the prosperity of our country.

“We must not forget that we represent 50 per cent of the consumers, and that by depriving, even partially, this category of its purchasing-power, we are at the same time throwing the entire economy of the nation out of gear.”

Nothing could show more plainly than these figures the enormous importance of the role played by the peasantry in the national life. Few people in Great Britain realise the extent to which the peasant question enters into everything in France. It is inevitable that no issue can arise in either foreign or domestic policy without the question being raised at the same time as to how the peasantry will be effected. Conversely, questions affecting the peasantry are of the widest interest, and must have

their repercussions not only on the other strata in French society but on the course of events in Europe and indeed throughout the world. The ensuing chapter will be devoted to an examination of the problems of peasant life which have already come to the fore, as well as of those which are only just beginning to loom on the horizon.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROBLEMS OF TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

**E**XTREMELY COMPLEX PROBLEMS are now awaiting a satisfactory solution in France—in the villages no less than in the towns. So much must be clear to the reader familiar with the salient features of the actual situation as they have been described in the three preceding chapters. Nor need there be any justification for imagining that solutions of the various problems are beyond reach of attainment. Indeed the two concluding chapters of the present book will be devoted to an examination of the extent to which attempts to find the necessary solutions have already begun to bear fruit.

Before proceeding any further, however, it is necessary to examine in greater detail the problems which have been touched upon in the earlier part of the book. The occasion is opportune in particular for a review of the various questions according to the degree of urgency involved in each case, for if some are demanding immediate attention, there are others of equal, or even greater, importance in the long run that have yet to reach the stage at which it will no longer be possible to postpone a solution.

The problem which has overshadowed all others in the last few years has been how to obtain a re-valorisation of the price of agricultural products. Prices fell catastrophically during the period of crisis which began in 1929. In a report published at the beginning of 1936 M. Renaud Jean, the president of the Agricultural Committee of the

Chamber of Deputies, gave some illuminating information regarding the situation at the worst point of the crisis. M. Jean's remarks deserve to be quoted, for although, as will be shown later, the price-situation has improved greatly, the memory of the bad years is still fresh in the minds of agriculturists. Divided on many questions, they are united in their determination to do whatever lies in their power to safeguard their industry from a fresh collapse of the same kind. M. Jean observed of wheat that

"it reached its record price in France in the first half of October 1926; it was then selling up to 240 francs the 100 kilos. For a fortnight the average price was 35 gold francs 89 centimes, which represented a rise in terms of gold-prices of 28·8 per cent over 1913. But the harvest in 1926 was 29 per cent less in quantity than that of 1913, which means that the rise in price only just balanced the fall in quantity, and that in reality the sum received by the producers was no higher in 1926 than in the earlier year.

"Thus should we attempt to get at the present situation of the producer by a bare comparison of prices, as that wheat was worth 27 francs in 1924 and 75 or 80 francs now, we should be wide of the mark.

"It is necessary to take into account the size of the harvest as well as the state of the market.

"If we take as the average price of each crop the mean of the monthly averages, and accept the figures of harvest-yield published in the Annual Statistics, the following results are obtained:

<i>Harvest</i>	<i>Average price (100 kilos) francs</i>	<i>Quantity (in quintals)</i>	<i>Total value (in millions of francs)</i>
1927	156	72,200,000	11·731
1928	143	76,600,000	10·953
1929	130	91,800,000	11·934
1930	165·50	62,100,000	10·277
1931	158·30	71,900,000	11·376
1932	101	90,800,000	9·170



"Here it must be noted that until 1931 the quantity harvested always more than balanced the fall in price which was occasioned by abundance—the best year, 1929, is precisely the one when prices were lowest. From 1932 onwards this is no longer the case. Although in 1932 the harvest was practically the same as in 1929 it was worth nearly three milliards less. And in fact the difference was still greater, for a large part of the 1932 harvest remained unsold and in consequence was fed to livestock.

"It is quite impossible to say what was the real value even approximately of the 1933 harvest. In theory it was disposed of at the minimum statutory price of 115 francs to 131 francs 50 (which for 96,000,000 quintals would have meant twelve milliards). In fact it was sold to millers and merchants at their own figure and, to an extent that is not ascertainable, put to uses other than human consumption.

"The same uncertainty exists, and for the same reason, in regard to the 1934 harvest. As to 1935 (approximately 76 million quintals), it is being sold around 80 francs. Unless the price improves, its total value will not exceed five milliards.

"To sum up, the gross proceeds of the wheat crop in France have fallen since the crisis from 12 to 6 milliards, a drop of 50 per cent.

"In the years immediately preceding the war the income from this source varied between two and two-and-a-half milliards. The co-efficient would appear therefore to be about 2·5 or even less."

A similar state of affairs obtained in most other branches of agriculture. As regards wine, M. Jean stated in his report that

"the gross value of the vintage fell from 11 milliards in 1928 to less than 5 milliards in 1934 (although in that year the quantity of wine produced was greater than in 1928 by 26 million hectolitres). And the proportion

accruing to growers fell from 8,600 million francs in 1930 to about 3 milliards in 1934, showing a drop of more than 65 per cent."

The revenue of this branch of agriculture at that time was again only about 2.5 times greater than before the war.

MM. Tardieu and Herriot in a report dated October 12th, 1934, affirmed roundly that meat prices on the Villette market at Paris had fallen 31 per cent in the case of beef, 10 per cent for mutton, and 13 for pork, and that this meant a drop of at least 50 per cent since 1930 in the price obtained by farmers. Eighteen months later it was estimated that the co-efficients applicable to meat-prices on the farm in 1936 as compared with 1914 were as follows:

Beef	.	.	.	.	2.8
Veal	.	.	.	.	3.2
Mutton	.	.	.	.	4.1
Pork	.	.	.	.	3.2 <sup>1</sup>

But cultivators are purchasers as well as vendors. What co-efficients were to be applied to the prevailing prices of farmers' outgoings in order to bring them into relation with pre-war levels? Fertilisers, which in countries such as Britain and France are an important item of expenditure, had advanced in price very considerably. Sulphate of ammonia, for example, cost 3.3 times as much, carbonate

<sup>1</sup> *Le Temps* of September 21st, 1936, gives figures indicating how farmers' profits were affected: "The total number of persons subject to tax on their agricultural profits fell from 633,471 in 1929 to 405,020 in 1930, to 319,015 in 1931, to 129,812 in 1932, to 120,089 in 1933, to 118,518 in 1934, and to 92,233 in 1935. The decrease was thus 541,000 in round numbers in six years, or 90 per cent.

"The amount of agricultural profits on ordinary property which was subject to tax fell from 4,321,542,600 francs in 1929 . . . to 477,482,700 francs in 1935."

of soda 4·5 times, superphosphates nearly five times more. Rents had in some cases tripled. Prices of agricultural machinery and building costs had risen to four or six-fold their former level. In the frequent cases where the agriculturist was under the necessity of purchasing a portion of his food requirements, as well as clothing and other necessities, he had to pay at least four times more than in 1914.

“It can be stated without exaggeration,” remarks M. Jean, “that the peasants after having sold at the co-efficient 2·5 or 3 buy at the co-efficient 4 or 5 or 6. Which means that they are being compelled to buy less and less. But the crisis continues, and either because he had no savings when it began, or has since exhausted what he had, or perhaps will only draw them out under extreme duress, every cultivator is led into restricting his purchases, into drawing in his horns, living on his own holding and avoiding the market.”

There was a time a few years ago when the British farmer was pretty hard hit also. Meat prices in particular underwent a period of rapid and extensive deterioration. But the critical period was not of very long duration, nor does it appear that, taking it all-round, the loss of farming income at the highest point of the crisis exceeded 15 or 20 per cent. Yet it will be remembered that in some parts of the country, notably in East Anglia, the indebtedness of the farmers reached serious proportions. Many farms were unlet, and hundreds of farmers were only able to carry on as a result of the accommodation they were able to obtain from their bankers.<sup>1</sup>

Considering the circumstance that agricultural prices in France dropped far more steeply, and that the period

<sup>1</sup> At one time on some of the largest estates in Norfolk the whole of the farms were left on the landlord's hands.

of prevailing low prices was of much longer duration, it will readily be appreciated that the French agriculturist is first and foremost concerned to assure the continuance of the process of re-valorisation which has already begun,<sup>1</sup> and that steps should be taken to ensure that he does not again suffer, as he has been doing for the last four years, from the evil effect of an uncontrolled break in prices.

Some improvement of the position has already taken place. Bad weather conditions in 1936 were a potent factor. The wine-harvest was one of the lowest on record in recent years, the total including Algeria being only about 51,000,000 hectolitres, and in consequence the price of wine has for the moment fully recovered the ground lost.

The short harvest similarly led to a rise in the price of wheat, and the legislation of 1936, which sought to establish a fixed price, also intervened in favour of the grower. The re-valorisation of meat-prices, on the other hand, in so far as it has taken place, would appear to be the result of the great increase in the purchasing-power of the industrial working-class in the period immediately following the wave of strikes in the beginning of June 1936, which terminated in favour of the workers. Re-valorisation is not yet complete. Some branches of agricultural production have still to experience an improvement in price-levels. Milk and fresh vegetables are in this

<sup>1</sup> The review of the *Agriculteurs de France* for September, 1936, gives the following figures showing the extent to which re-valorisation had taken place even at that date:

Commodity	Prices in Francs		Rise per cent
	Dec. 1935	Aug. 1936	
Wheat (quintal). . .	78·04	115	47
Oats       "       . . .	52·08	90	73
Beef per kilo . . .	5·66	7 60	36
Pork   "   "       . . .	4·34	6·90	58
White Sugar . . .	169	190	7
Wine (per degree) . .	5 to 6	9 to 9·50	50

category. Possibly the general improvement in industry and trade which is at last becoming general in France may further contribute to raising agricultural prices, but it can be stated without fear of contradiction that the peasantry will not rest content until permanent and effective means have been devised for stabilising the selling-price of the various agricultural commodities at a level which permits the cultivator to live at least as well as he was doing before the great slump overtook him.

The problem is of course by no means confined to this. Farmers are consumers as well as producers! Notwithstanding that so many of them, with their dependants, live largely on the produce of their own farms, a tolerable standard of living pre-supposes considerable purchases of additional necessities of the kind they have long ceased to produce for themselves. Clothing and household utensils, foodstuffs, such as coffee and sugar, must come from the shop and have to be paid for in hard cash.

And then there is the long list of articles required for the conduct of farming operations; the fertilisers, oil-cake, machinery, seed, and often fuel as well. If the price of all these requirements of the farming population were to rise in the same proportion as the prices for farm products, then, obviously, the farmer would be no better off as a result of the re-valorisation of his produce.

What is the position? In fact there had been a marked tendency for almost all categories of goods, whether for personal consumption or for utilisation in production, to rise against the farmer ever since the war. Reference has already been made to the greatly increased prices ruling for fertilisers in recent years as compared with the pre-war period. M. Braibant<sup>1</sup> gives some further examples:

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 80.

"A two-horse plough of the Brabant type could be obtained before the war for 150 francs, to-day the cultivator pays 1,200 francs for one . . . a horse-collar in place of 30 francs now costs 180 francs; a reaper-binder used to cost 800 to 900 francs, it costs 6,000 at the present time . . . a spade that used to be 4 francs is now sold for 25. The charge for shoeing a horse has risen from 80 centimes to 5 francs 50 centimes."

As for the general cost-of-living index, in October 1934 it was 5.31 times higher than in 1913. It would seem a reasonable assumption that this tendency must continue until such time as some new factor intervenes to arrest it. It is doubtless mainly due to the fact that there is greater concentration of capital in industry and commerce than is the case in agriculture, and so consequently it is easier to eliminate cut-throat competition. Selling-agreements between groups of traders in a particular category of products can be arrived at, the closing-down temporarily, or even permanently, of superfluous plant becomes practicable.

But without going into all the various factors governing costs of production in industry, and the selling price of manufactured products, it is clear that no economic influences have made their appearance such as would suggest that farmers are likely to benefit by a halt in the forward movement of prices of manufactured goods. There remains, however, the possibility of State action.

Here it has to be admitted that the most momentous decision recently taken by a French Government in the sphere of price-control has been one to occasion grave misgivings amongst the farmers. Faced with a difficult financial situation, the Government of M. Léon Blum decided in the autumn of 1936 to devalue the franc by about one-third of its former gold-content. The necessary

legislation came into force on October 1st. Now it is true that a similar devaluation had been carried through in Great Britain five years before without it being followed by a general rise in prices. Moreover M. Blum's measure contained stringent provisions aimed at preventing speculators from making devaluation the excuse to advance prices. The necessary administrative machinery for giving effect to these provisions had already been set up by an earlier measure which had become law in August of the same year.

Farmers nevertheless were nervous, and, as it now appears six months after the devaluation, not without reason.

"At a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Radical Party to-day M. Daladier . . . estimated the rise in French wholesale prices within the last year at 36 per cent, the rise in retail prices at 23 per cent, and in the cost of living at 11 per cent."<sup>1</sup>

M. Daladier, leader of a party which draws much of its support from the middle and small peasantry, went on to utter a warning that the rise could not go on indefinitely without great danger.

And so, for the moment, the peasant is even more pre-occupied with the question of preventing somehow a further general rise in the cost of living and an advance in the prices quoted him for his farming requirements than with seeing to it that his own produce is disposed of at reasonable prices.

It must not be assumed, however, that the peasant cultivators have no other pressing problems. The question of peasant indebtedness is also far from having found its final solution. Only a few years ago, when prices were fairly stable, there was very little indebtedness amongst

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, March 1st, 1937.

the peasants. The provident habits of the French peasant are proverbial. So long as it was possible for him to keep even the smallest margin on the right side, he retained his incentive to save against a rainy day, and only in the rarest instances had recourse to outside sources for credit, excepting such temporary advances as were abundantly secured on his crops and his land and stock. So severe was the crisis from 1930 onwards, however, that not only were savings used up, but for the first time perhaps in his life, a sober, thrifty cultivator was forced to borrow, and borrow moreover as he best could, often at ruinous rates of interest. No figures, unfortunately, are available as to the total indebtedness of cultivators, apart from the amount owing to the *Crédit agricole*, but that alone represents a very substantial sum, and it is only necessary to peruse the reports of local institutions of the *Crédit*, no matter in what part of the country, during the later years of the crisis to realise that the situation has become desperate. So much so that one of the earliest measures of the *Front Populaire* Government in the domain of agriculture was to pass a law (in August 1936) affording some relief to agricultural debtors. Under this law it has been possible for farmers to obtain from the courts a stay of execution, securing them for the time being against eviction. At the same time they are enabled to obtain loans from the *Crédit agricole* at much lower interest to pay off some of their private creditors, while short-term loans with the *Crédit* are in these circumstances sometimes convertible into medium or even long-term obligations.

To the extent that these provisions are being applied in practice considerable relief has been afforded to the agricultural debtor, but it is too early to say, in the absence of reliable information as to the real extent of peasant-indebtedness, whether or not further action will become



necessary in the near future. Clearly the whole question is bound up with the over-riding problems of the cost of living and the level of agricultural prices.

Another question that has been much to the fore is that of farm-rents. So long as leases run for relatively short periods, and the proprietor's right to exact the highest possible rent from his tenant is not limited by law, so long will it be possible for an ever-increasing proportion of a tenant-farmer's earnings to find their way into his landlord's pocket. Action which results in better prices for agricultural products or curbs the rise in the cost of living may fail to benefit a large number of farmers unless they are in a position to obtain the land on the same terms they are enjoying to-day.

Nor is that all. There are still many nine-year leases in force which were contracted in the "good old days" before prices collapsed. Even taking into account the better prices which have obtained recently, there are unquestionably many farmers who are paying an excessively high rental for their land at the present time.

Still more urgent is the question of *métayage*.<sup>1</sup> In the regions where it obtains the situation has reached a point where something will very shortly have to be done to allay discontent. Opportunities for abuse under present conditions are so evident, the security of the *métayer* is so precarious, that there need be no occasion for surprise if the movement in favour of the radical modification of the conditions of *métayage*, and even its abolition, is receiving increased support amongst ever-wider circles. At the very least the actual demand is for the guaranteeing of a minimum of subsistence to the *métayer* before the landlord can be allowed to participate in the revenue of the *métairie*; almost equally insistent is the demand that he

<sup>1</sup> Vide Chapter II.

who does the actual work should receive a greater share than a mere half of the produce.

The conflict between landlord and tenant over the question of rent, as has already been stated, is by no means satisfactorily settled, and this in spite of the passing of legislation dealing with the question in April 1933 and again in July 1935. On the latter occasion it came out that, of approximately three-quarters of a million tenant-farmers, only 90,000 had availed themselves of the provisions of the previous law designed to afford facilities for obtaining a reduction of rent.

The trouble is largely that a landlord still has at his disposal one almost unanswerable argument for the tenant who comes to him with a request for a more generously-worded lease. It is this: "If you are not prepared to continue as before, then I regret there is no option for me but to terminate the lease." The longer the tenant has been in occupation, the more work he has put into the farm, the greater the force of the argument. Of what avail is the privilege of being able to obtain through the courts a reduction of rent, if within a very short period the tenant finds himself obliged to surrender possession of the land into which he has sunk labour and capital?

Because of this difficulty, previous legislation aiming at safeguarding tenants against unfair rents has been rendered nugatory, and the feeling is consequently growing that no real progress can be hoped for in this direction until an attempt is made to obtain a greater security of tenure. This is the purpose of the parliamentary bill drafted by the *Front Populaire* Government at the end of 1936. This bill provided that in the event of a landlord declining to renew a lease, or refusing to accept the rent fixed by the court, the farmer should be entitled to compensation for eviction. The compensation awarded would take into

account all losses which would be occasioned to the farmer as well as the possible profits of which he would be deprived as a result of eviction. Special attention was paid to ensure that compensation should be granted in respect of capital sunk in the farm which could not easily be realised, such as manuring, drainage, etc.

This bill followed in its general outlines the provisions of similar legislation already in force which protect the rights of commercial people conducting their businesses on leasehold premises. But in one respect it was less generous to the leaseholder, for the shopkeeper has the absolute right to sell his business, including his whole stock-in-trade, his fixtures, and the good-will, but under the new bill the tenant-farmer is given no corresponding right to dispose of his farm, except to the landlord. Moreover in the event of the landlord evicting a tenant in order to farm the land himself, the tenant was only to receive a sum equivalent to the actual enhanced value of the farm at the end of his tenancy, which might be considerably less than the sum he had sunk in improvements, owing to the intrusion of other factors. Compensation for improvements was, however, to be given, even when the tenant vacated the farm of his own choice.

While in principle this legislative proposal, if it eventually becomes law, will protect the tenant from summary eviction, and will give him first refusal (which he does not yet possess), in practice there exist obvious possibilities open to the landlord for getting round it. Thus it might be possible to "bid up" the tenant and induce him to agree to a higher rent, by bringing on the scene a third-party, secretly in league with the landlord, who would make a higher offer. Since the decision in such a case would rest with the ordinary civil judge who is not necessarily an agricultural expert, fear of losing his farm might

lead the tenant to agree to the landlord's terms without the matter ever coming to court at all. For this reason a proposal is being made from some quarters that special arbitration-boards, on which tenants are directly represented, should be set up in all localities, with powers to adjudicate in a practical and commonsense way on all questions pertaining to rent.

Great hopes are placed by many supporters of the *Front Populaire* on the collective contract as a means of improving the position of the small peasant, as well as the agricultural labourer, in relation to other sections of the community. In the case of the latter, the right to establish collective agreements with employers having the force of law was guaranteed by one of the first legislative enactments of the Blum Government in the summer of 1936, which covered the whole field of labour; the agricultural labourers together with workers in industry. The agricultural unions have already concluded a number of contracts of this nature with groups of employers. An example of one such type of agreement is given in Appendix A at the end of this book.

In February last year the Chamber of Deputies entered upon the discussion of a further measure proposed by M. Blum's Government and intended "to adjust relations between agricultural producers, traders and manufacturers through the conclusion of collective agreements governing the marketing of agricultural products in a particular branch of production". In its main outlines the proposal can be summarised under three heads. In the first place, an existing agricultural organisation concerned with production or marketing may, on behalf of its members, enter into a contract for the purchase of their produce with one or more traders or manufacturers or with consumers' co-operatives: the contract to be valid for a

period of from one to three years. Members of an organisation which intends to enter into such an agreement are to have the right to withdraw from membership in the event of their objecting to the agreement. The second part of the proposal is to give the Minister of Agriculture the power, after consultation with the appropriate professional bodies, to make such an agreement binding on other parties in the same branch of production and in respect to the area covered by the original agreement. Lastly, on the demand of interested parties, the Minister may set up a commission entrusted with the task of preparing a collective agreement covering a particular field, which he may eventually make binding on all concerned.

In the course of a speech in the Chamber, M. Renaud Jean, Chairman of its Agricultural Committee, suggested that this measure was possibly "the most important of all the various and numerous projects with which we shall be dealing during the coming months".

It is by no means unlikely that such an estimate of its importance will prove to have been correct, for there can be little doubt that the rawness of the deal which agriculture in France has been getting for a very long time has been due to the weakness in bargaining power of the agricultural interests. As M. Henry Girard, President of the Chamber of Agriculture of the Oise, stated at a Conference at Dijon in 1936:

"From the point of view of doing business, the individual is too insignificant or the market is too vast. According to Pierre Caziot, at a recent congress of the Agronomical Institute, there are 3,000,000 agricultural holdings in France. Even ruling out the smallest, what a massive total to compare with 3,320 breweries, distilleries, and cider-factories, 8,422 mills, 2,020 jam-and-preserves undertakings, 15,128 slaughterhouses and meat-packing establishments, 28,452 tanneries, 266

metal-works, or 5,988 factories for the manufacture of chemical products, fertilisers, etc. In dealing with such compact units, we, individuals, can achieve nothing."

The development of the principle of collective agreements between agricultural producers and the purchasers of agricultural products will be watched with special interest in this country, where a great deal has recently been accomplished in the same field. Indeed opinion in French agricultural circles has been greatly impressed by the success of some of the marketing schemes in Great Britain (notably the milk and the hops schemes) in organising the market after a period of chaos. Conditions in France are in some ways very different, and agreements may easily prove difficult to frame in the first instance and yet more difficult to enforce. The need for some further measure of organisation is, however, plain, and it is not impossible that necessity may induce the peasants at no distant date to take proper advantage of new opportunities for collective bargaining if these are offered.<sup>1</sup>

The growing movement in favour of collective agreements in agriculture is a direct consequence of recent successes of the industrial workers in securing acceptance of the principle of collective bargaining in their own sphere. Similarly, the achievements of the organised trade-union movement in the domain of the social services has inspired the peasantry to put forward a renewed demand that such reforms be applied to the small working-farmer as well. The forty-hour week was no sooner won by the industrial workers than the agricultural labourers began to demand the statutory limitation of their hours also. Already in February of this year the agricultural committee

<sup>1</sup> The bill to establish collective-contracts in regard to the sale of agricultural produce was passed by 370 votes to 210 in the Chamber of Deputies at the beginning of March.

of the Chamber of Deputies approved a bill introduced by the Communist group which fixes a maximum number of hours *per annum* to be worked by agricultural labourers, this being assured by limiting the working-day according to the season, with a longer day in the summer, and a shorter day in winter. It is anticipated that this measure, if it becomes law, will have some effect also on the hours worked by peasants farming their own land, since these tend to approximate to those of the hired labourer—the longer the latter works, the longer must the peasant-farmer work in order to be able to sell in competition with farmers who employ labour.

Always under the influence of comparisons he is impelled to draw between his lot and that of the industrial workers and the Government employé's, the peasant is now demanding family allowances on the same scale as theirs. Theoretically these have been granted to agricultural labourers since the passing of the law of March 11th, 1932. But in practice they have yet to be applied in most departments. In France, a country with a declining birth-rate, this form of social service assumes great importance. So long as the agricultural labourer was less generously treated than others, a strong incentive existed for quitting the land in search of employment where juster conditions prevailed.

The present demand is not only that the hired labourer in agriculture should receive assistance, but that the working-farmer, whether owning his land or renting it, should likewise benefit. The demand would seem difficult to refuse, since the laws in question are based on the necessity (which arises partly from military considerations) to arrest the decline in the birth-rate.

As for the young, so for the old. While recent legislation has been along the line of establishing schemes of old-age

insurance on a contributory basis, the problem of pensions for those who are already too old to qualify under such schemes has arisen. One proposal is for a non-contributory state pension of 3,600 francs a year at age sixty to be granted to workmen, with a further 1,200 francs for the wife. The right to receive this pension is also being claimed by the small peasants who own or rent their holdings.

In the struggle for the old-age pension, the French Communist Party has been playing a conspicuous part. There can be no doubt that provision for the aged folk is a very widespread demand amongst both workers and peasants. During the Easter parliamentary recess last year, at a time when the Blum Government, yielding to the demands of the Right, had announced the famous "pause" in social legislation, its Communist allies seized the occasion to redouble their efforts on behalf of the old people. A monster meeting to demand the old-age pension was held in the Vélodrome d'Hiver at Paris one Thursday afternoon, attended by over 25,000 persons. Writing next day in *L'Humanité* M. Vaillant-Couturier exclaimed:

"Unquestionably it was the most impressive meeting I have ever attended and the most remarkable. These grey hairs, these gnarled hands, these backs bent with toil, these eyes grown weak with watching and tears, all this human mass, the creators through long years of so much beauty, so much comfort, such progress, these mothers and fathers of so many living beings, brought into that place the dignity of a France long silent, yet which had not ceased to claim fidelity towards engagements undertaken, loyalty towards the promises that had been made."

The winter and spring of 1936-7, characterised by flooding in many parts of the country, rendered still more insistent a demand for the provision of adequate protection



against damage to agriculturists arising from weather-conditions. The State had already intervened as early as 1932, when a law was passed to encourage farmers to ensure against hail and other natural calamities; but the insufficiency of the 1932 law was fully demonstrated in 1936, which was a disastrous year, particularly for wine-growers. The problem is a complicated one, but none the less serious for a country where there is so much small-scale farming. On the other hand, compared with many regions of the world, weather conditions in France are comparatively stable, and if risks are spread over a period of years and over a sufficiently large part of the country, there does not seem to be any valid reason why a workable scheme cannot be devised. What appears to be essential, however, is that the matter should be dealt with by the State; no private organisation could possibly hope to succeed in tackling it.

Such are the problems, predominantly economic in character, which are exercising the minds of the French peasantry at the moment. There is another problem, however, never absent for long from discussions about present-day affairs, which far transcends in importance all purely economic considerations in the mind of the great bulk of the rural population. In the last few years the fear that France may—it might even be said will—be involved in another war for very existence, has taken hold of all classes of the community, the peasantry not less than the others. And here it is to be observed that the sentiment of personal detachment from the issue of peace and war is a luxury which no Frenchmen finds himself able to afford. It is not uncommon even to-day to find people in England, including ex-servicemen, whose first reaction on coming to realise the dangers of the international situation is to vow that next time they “will not go”. As though war

to-day were any longer a question in which the individual is permitted to choose whether or not he will be involved.

The question does not present itself in this fashion to the French peasant, who is fully aware of his liability to be called to arms in any emergency until such time as he is past military age. If he himself is not called on to fight there rests the certainty that other members of the family will be mobilised. There are still some who can remember the Prussian invasion in 1871. Memories of the second invasion of the French soil between 1914 and 1918 are still vivid. This is particularly the case in the departments which were occupied by the German armies, and which were largely devastated.

In the course of the war of 1914-1918 some 3,200,000 men—two fifths of the total number engaged in agriculture, including women and children—were mobilised. Of those mobilised about 20 per cent were killed, and 38 per cent wounded. Figures such as these speak for themselves. There is not a village in all France where there are not still to be found numbers of men more or less incapacitated as a result of their war experiences, not to mention widows who have lost their husbands and children who had never known their fathers.

At the World Peace Congress which assembled at Brussels in the late summer of 1936 French agriculture was strongly represented, not only in the presence of a number of leading technicians, and of representatives from the agricultural trade-unions, but also by a number of working-peasants from various parts of the country. At the Congress, M. P. Mioch, speaking on behalf of the latter, alluded to the

“constantly increasing apprehensions of the peasants in face of the terrifying prospects of a new war. The women, the young-folk, the able-bodied, the old people, who

lost their dear ones in the last war, and have made heavy sacrifices to bring up a new generation," he declared, "are obsessed by this terrible anxiety.

"The last war brought them only bereavement, suffering, and ruin. Post-war prosperity was largely fictitious . . . and it cannot be gainsaid that so long as the various countries must devote enormous sums to paying the cost of the war, to preparing the next one, or defending themselves against it, it will be difficult to make provision for the satisfaction of those demands for which the peasant world is clamouring."

Nowadays the peasants are not so simple as to imagine that the various reforms which they have been demanding, and to obtain which so many of them assisted in voting a Popular Front Government into power in 1936, will be realisable in their entirety so long as France is compelled to allot heavy and constantly-increasing sums to military expenditure. Consequently the quest for peace is for the peasant not merely the struggle against war itself; it tends also to include a struggle for a foreign policy which can hold out some hope for him of lightening the incidence of the crushing taxation imposed by the exigencies of defence. The position in which he finds himself to-day drives him inexorably to prefer policies of pooled security, by which the costs of national defence are spread over a wider field than France itself, to the kind of thing known in this country as "splendid isolation". Fearing above all the menace of Hitler Germany, the French peasant is an enthusiastic supporter of the Franco-Soviet pact, even when his sympathies are far removed from the social order obtaining in contemporary Russia. For the same reason he warmly supports the pro-British orientation of M. Blum's foreign policy, being convinced that both the British and French peoples are once again face to face with a common danger.

We have thus far been considering only those problems which have come within the scope of current political issues. But it must not be assumed that peasant aspirations are confined to immediate questions alone. The ferment amongst large masses of the people goes far deeper. To the extent that the peasant is coming to realise the hopelessness of expecting a permanent solution of his existing difficulties while the danger persists that his country may again be dragged into war, he is beginning to speculate also on the possibility in a not-too-distant future of being able to achieve such a standard of well-being for himself and his family as formerly seemed incapable of attainment. A certain section of the peasant world is turning in the direction of Communism and is consciously considering how Russian experience in regard to collective-farming could be applied at home. This is still, however, a relatively small section. But on the other hand the feeling that the achievements of modern science in the domain of agriculture ought surely to afford the basis for a less circumscribed existence is undoubtedly both widespread and growing, particularly amongst the younger peasants, and first and foremost amongst those who have passed through the stages of a technical education in their profession. One group of young technicians, which includes a number of agricultural experts, has launched the slogan: "working one-tenth as hard and as long as to-day, it will be possible to live ten times as well". To anyone who is prepared to consider soberly the possibilities for increased production, as, theoretically at least, they are demonstrable, such a claim need not appear mere rhetoric. There can be no doubt that the physical conditions are already present for a very large expansion of France's agricultural production.

In his book, *Misère ou Prospérité Paysanne?* from which we have already quoted, M. René Dumont examines some

of the more obvious possibilities of an increase of production. Prefacing his remarks with the observation that the consumption of bread in France is already high, and that an increase in the production of wheat is therefore unlikely, M. Dumont goes on to indicate other directions in which production could be expanded:

“ . . . operating as a single factor, an increase in yield would entail a diminution of the area sown to wheat. The abandonment right away of the poorest cornlands would only mean a contraction of 5 per cent in the total production, assuming 10 per cent of the present area were given up. . . . With a greater use of mechanical traction, fewer horses would be required and so less oats. During these latter years the yield of this cereal . . . has increased noticeably. A large decrease in the area cultivated can be anticipated. On the other hand, the production of barley and of maize can be maintained and possibly increased. Our own production does not meet requirements.

“It would seem reasonable to assume that the area under roots—beetroot and potatoes—grown for both human and animal consumption will for the present remain as it is; the increase in the yield per unit would be likely to compensate for any increase of demand.

“An expansion in the area devoted to forage crops is to be looked for as well as a renewal of the process of creating meadows on land abandoned for cereals. The movement in this direction which has latterly been held up must again be set going if we admit the need to increase considerably the production of milk and butter (in replacement of other fats), to breed more sheep and expand the supply of fresh meat.

“It is certainly desirable to postulate a much greater production of fruit, particularly in the *Midi* and also of certain kinds of vegetables, not excluding spring greens, which should be available in quantity for the benefit of working-class and peasant families.”

M. Dumont's estimation of the directions in which agricultural production could be increased in France is of some interest to British agriculturists amongst whom are many who deprecate the extent to which wheat and sugar-beet (in the interests of a war-time self-sufficiency) are grown on land which is not really suited to these crops.

"A correct agricultural policy," states Sir Daniel Hall, "would concentrate on the production of milk and fresh foods such as fruit and vegetables which are necessary in large quantities for the urban population and are peculiarly adapted to our climate and soil".<sup>1</sup>

While Great Britain and France differ in the fact that the latter is capable of producing almost the whole of the wheat required for domestic consumption, whereas the former must in any case import the major part of its requirements, both countries are alike in requiring far more perishable foodstuffs, particularly fruit and vegetables than they are at present producing. The time is possibly not far distant when the problem of malnutrition, which lies at the root of the progressive physical degeneration of the urban population, will have to be tackled energetically. A satisfactory solution is inconceivably short of a determined endeavour to increase agricultural production as a whole.

An increase of agricultural production presupposes, of course, an extension of the existing market for agricultural products. In what directions is this possible? Reference has already been made to the fact of under-consumption in the towns. It is not so generally recognised that there is under-consumption also in the villages, though of a somewhat different character. In particular the consumption of meat is extremely low in the rural areas. Thus a

<sup>1</sup> *Le Monde Agraire et la Paix*, Paris, 1936.

re-valorisation of the price of agricultural products, always assuming that the benefits were passed on to the great mass of the rural population, would certainly be one of the principal factors contributing to the absorption of a greater output. In the opinion of many peasants the securing of better prices for agricultural products is a necessity if the working-class is to maintain the improved standards obtained in 1936. The argument appears in the resolution passed unanimously at a demonstration at Auxerre in July, 1936, attended by 9,000 peasants of the department of the Yonne. The gathering it may be remarked, was on a scale large enough to exclude any possibility that it was not genuinely representative of the overwhelming majority of the peasant cultivators in that part of France. The resolution sets out to define the attitude of the peasantry to the then newly acquired increases of wages by the industrial workers. It assumes that "an increase of industrial costs of production will contract the internal market for practically all commodities produced in France". In order to counteract this, the resolution goes on to advocate "re-valorisation of the produce of the soil", which by "increasing the purchasing-power of the peasantry will enlarge the scope of the internal market", and thus "enable the other classes who labour to maintain the improved standard of wages they have recently obtained".

Higher prices for farm-products are here represented to be the complement of higher wages in industry. The peasant looks to the industrial worker as to his best customer, but realises that the latter must fail him unless he in turn is enabled to purchase larger quantities of the goods which industry produces.

The internal market is, of course, by no means the only one accessible to the products of French agriculture. Apart

from the superior quality wines which find their way all over the world, there is an enormous potential market on this side of the Channel for vegetables which can be produced earlier in the season in many parts of France than is possible in Great Britain. Without entering into competition with the home-grown product, the French agriculturist, given favourable conditions, could contribute very greatly to supplying British households with the kind of foodstuffs which are more and more coming to be regarded as essential constituents of a wholesome, balanced, human diet.

Naturally an expansion of the market, even if it is accompanied by a further rise in the prices of agricultural products, or of such as are still stagnant, cannot of itself procure more than a very limited increase in production. The eventual solution of the problem of deriving from the soil all of which it is capable lies largely in the domain of technique. Compared with many other countries in Europe, including Great Britain, the technical equipment of agriculture in France is backward. That such is the case the facts given in the preceding chapter bear witness. Even without taking into account the employment of improved types of agricultural machinery which have yet to find their way on to the market, a full utilisation of well-established machines which have already proved their usefulness would greatly increase the total of production, and at the same time could contribute sensibly to the shortening of the hours normally worked on the land.

“The possibilities of mechanisation in agriculture are often denied,” observes M. Dumont: “the problem is not the same as in industry, for the agricultural factory is scattered over the entire field-surface and its working depends on atmospheric conditions over which—for the moment at any rate—we have scarcely any



control. But the possibilities for reducing labour and increasing production although admittedly less than they are in industry proper are nevertheless considerable.

"Animal energy throughout the nineteenth century and after more and more took the place of human energy. Formerly practically confined to a very superficial preparation of the soil (ploughing, harrowing, etc.) and transport, it came to be used for harvesting operations (hay-cutters, reapers, binders, rakes), in weeding and spraying crops, for threshing etc.; an improvement in livestock based on better methods of selection and feeding having paved the way. At the same time the preparation of the tilth was improved and a greater yield obtained. In regions of intensive cultivation the greater employment of animal energy coupled with the progress of agricultural science (chemistry, plant-breeding) doubled and sometimes even trebled the hourly productivity of human labour. And the amount of human energy expended per hour of labour has grown constantly less, since the big increase of production has taken place concurrently with a progressive diminution of the rural population.

"With the twentieth century, and even earlier, we find a new factor in agriculture coming into play, which will bring, if we learn how to make use of it, even more important results. *Inanimate* energy; steam, carburants, and most important of all, electricity are replacing both human and animal energy.

"Motors installed within the farm itself drive threshing-plants, root-slicers, saws, pumps, granary-elevators, separators, churns, etc. To-morrow, in buildings specially constructed for the purpose, they will work conveyors taking foodstuffs to the mangers, mechanical-brooms removing manure from stables, etc.

"For the carriage of crops from field to farm, of manures in the inverse direction, pneumatic tyred carts, and tip-up lorries, which later in the season will be fitted behind with loaders for hay or manure, or sheaf-hoists, will considerably reduce the human effort involved in these operations (which will become extremely agreeable to perform in the open-air).

"For field-work mechanical cultivation in all its applications will not only entail a reduction in the expenditure of energy but also, by doing the work quickly, will permit of its being carried out under the most favourable conditions.

"A clay soil, as is known, can be worked neither too dry nor too wet, the most suitable conditions only obtain in some cases for a few days, yet a satisfactory yield is only possible when the work is done at this precise moment. When an epidemic of *oidium* or mildew threatens, the vineyard has to be sprayed within a few days, a week at the longest."<sup>1</sup>

Amongst other means by which production could be increased should be mentioned the more extensive use of fertilisers and the carrying out of field-drainage. France is particularly backward in the latter respect. Tile drainage was introduced into France a few years after its first application in England as long ago as 1830, but even in 1926, nearly a century later, there were only 200,000 hectares of land in the whole country drained in this way.

Sir Frederick Keeble has explained that we are still living in a world that is starved for nitrogen.

"That vast mass of nitrogen," he writes, "which makes up four-fifths of the atmosphere provides a grim spectacle of unemployment. Atmospheric nitrogen passes in and out of our lungs unchanged, although our bodies may be hungering for it; yet that same nitrogen when linked with carbon and other elements becomes the breath of life.

"The chemist has intervened by calling in a new world wherein never more need the gaunt spectre of famine stalk the earth, and where health shall be the rule and disease the exception—the world of nitrogen plenty."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Le Monde Agraire et la Paix*, Paris, 1936, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Scottish Journal of Agriculture*, October, 1933.

According to M. Georges Truffault France in 1934 used only 2 kilogrammes of nitrate per hectare of arable land as against Great Britain's 4, and no less than 11 kilogrammes in Germany at that time.

Turning from the question of production to that of transport, which is scarcely less important, it can be stated that the actual position in France is much better. The country is well served by rail and by road, and has in addition an excellent system of navigable inland waterways, which are of great value to agriculture as a means for the transport not only of bulky produce of a non-perishable nature, but also of supplies of fertiliser, fuel, etc., necessary to the farmer.

One direction, however, in which further development of transport facilities is indicated is the provision of more cold-storage trucks on the railways. Speaking at the annual conference of the Co-operative Federation at Toulon in 1935, M. Bichain on behalf of the P.L.M. railway company claimed that the latest type of cold-storage truck in use on the French railways was superior to the Italian make, although the latter was frequently held up as a model of efficiency. There is no doubt, however, that the provision of additional rolling-stock of this nature would become necessary if the production of fresh fruit and vegetables were to be largely increased, particularly in view of the fact that relatively high temperatures are encountered in southern and south-western France during a large part of the year.

So much for the possibilities of mechanisation. It should be stated, however, that there are many difficulties standing in the way of a rapid application of mechanisation to the farm. Even in England where mechanical power is being introduced it has often been found necessary to break down the hedges which have remained as they were

since the commons were first enclosed. Yet the size of the smallest fields in the English countryside is many times greater than that of the tiny plots into which so much of the surface of France has, as a result of the prevailing law of succession, come to be divided.

“The parcels belonging to each owner are often scattered in various localities and in different directions and at different distances from the villages in which the vast majority of the farmers live. The agricultural holdings of a single proprietor comprise one or more properties so that in 1882 the 125,000,000 small parcels constituting 12,000,000 properties were comprised in 5,672,607 land holdings.”<sup>1</sup>

This excessive parcelling of the soil is characteristic of eastern France, in such regions for instance as Champagne, Lorraine and Burgundy, but it is found to some extent all over the country. M. Caziot in this connection mentions the commune of Chaingy in the Loiret where 2,179 hectares are divided into 48,000 parcels, giving an average of about one-tenth of an acre per plot! Far from being suitable for mechanised cultivation such plots cannot even be worked with animal traction, and have to be dug with the spade.

In the reconstruction of the devastated areas, where old landmarks were obliterated, an attempt was made to re-group agricultural holdings into units of more manageable size. It was made possible for a landowner to receive a single plot of land equivalent in area to the total of his former scattered holdings. Thus in fifteen villages in the department of Meurthe-et-Moselle the villagers were able to convert 24,359 minute parcels into 5,911 fair-sized fields.

Generally-speaking, however, it may be said that the excessive sub-division of the land constitutes a problem

<sup>1</sup> Michael, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

which has yet to be tackled, but one which must inevitably be solved before any large-scale application of mechanisation in agriculture becomes practical politics. Yet before the peasants will consent to merge their separate holdings into units of the size required for tractor cultivation much educational work will have to be carried out. It is far too early as yet to attempt any forecast as to just how this extremely necessary reform will eventually be realised.

Two really distinct questions are involved. The first is how the present scattered parcels of a single property can be rendered more homogeneous, thereby enlarging the size of the fields, and the second is how very small individual holdings belonging to separate owners or tenants can be grouped so as to form units of cultivation on a scale sufficient to justify resort to mechanisation. The latter question impinges on a still wider one, namely the conditions under which the demand for access to the land, not only of the completely landless, but also of the very large number of peasants whose present holdings are insufficient, is going to be satisfied.

Some addition to the cultivable area can be made by reclaiming further land from the sea. This is possible, for instance, in southern Brittany and the Vendée. There are lands lying along the foot of the Massif Central which could be made available for intensive cultivation by the construction of irrigation works, as has already been done in some cases. Large areas are to be found in such parts of the country as the Sologne, which are still only partially reclaimed from their marshy condition. Much light land in eastern France, as for example in the Chatillonnais, Montagne and the Plateau de Langres has gone almost completely out of cultivation as a result of excessive subdivision of the units of cultivation. In all these directions there exist possibilities for making more land available

for cultivation, increasing the number of peasants with an interest other than a purely wage-interest in agriculture, and giving additional acres to small farmers whose holdings are now too small to permit of their gaining a reasonable livelihood for themselves and their families.

Beyond this, progress would only seem possible by tackling the question of land-ownership, and recommencing the process of transferring land from the big proprietor to the peasants which was begun during the Revolution of 1789-1793.

Some of the large estates are of course already being worked economically on lines in keeping with the progress of agricultural technique. But where this is not the case, and land is to be transferred to peasant cultivators, it is reasonable to assume that the State will lay down conditions, when it has the possibility of so doing, which will ensure that the land is to be worked in such a manner as to obtain the full benefits of modern methods including, of course, recourse to mechanisation.

If agriculture is to be placed on its feet attention will have to be paid to the question of taxation, which in France is unusually heavy on agricultural produce, whether it be a case of the various kind of direct taxation, or still more of the indirect, or consumption, taxes. Indeed the existing fiscal burdens on agriculturists form a favourite theme for those elements to dwell on who seek to create hostility between the peasantry and the other large classes which compose the nation. Thus M. Henri Dorgères (of whom more hereafter) in his book *Haut les Fourches!* declares:

“In the last analysis, it is the agricultural producer who . . . bears the crushing load of taxation.

“In 1935, our total fiscal and social charges will amount to approximately 99 milliards of francs, whereas in 1913 it was only 9 milliards (or 45 milliards in terms

of the present-day franc). Charges have thus more than doubled in their real incidence.

"However, to stop at that point and suggest that France is to-day paying only twice as much in taxation as in 1913 would be a serious mistake. According to M. Dessirier, a leading statistician, France's annual income can be assessed at 36 milliards gold in 1913, that is 180 milliards reckoned in francs of to-day, whereas her present income in paper francs has fallen to 150 milliards, so that the French taxpayer hands over to the State the fantastic proportion of 66 per cent of his income (which is as much as to say that we work two days for the State as against only one day for ourselves).

"But this holds good for the public as a whole, and we observed a moment ago that this heavy charge falls more particularly on the agriculturist. Some explanation is necessary.

"Efforts have been made to spread amongst tradespeople, industrialists, officials and workers an idea that the farmer pays no taxes! If only the schedule of agricultural profits is taken into consideration, it is easily understood how such a fable could gain credence. Actually less than 40 million francs were paid in tax under this head in 1933 by occupiers of land at a time when the State was taking nearly 3 milliards on industrial and commercial profits.

"It is forgotten, however, that the peasant pays tax on land not built on, under this head handing over very large sums to the State, the Departments, and the Communes; that he alone is laid under contribution for the upkeep of rural roads; that he gets no relief from the full scale of payment of the heavy inheritance-duty; that he pays in their entirety, with no possible means of evasion, the transfer-taxes on his land and stock; that he bears a large part of the transport taxes, and uses appreciable quantities of petrol for his tractors and motors."

No serious person would be likely to support M. Dorgères in his contention that more than two-thirds of the farmers'

earnings find their way into the coffers of the State. Nevertheless taxation of agricultural produce has indeed reached an exceedingly high level. M. Marcel Braibant gives some interesting figures regarding the percentage on the selling-prices of various agricultural products levied by way of tax (the figures relate to the year 1935):

Sugar	.	.	.	.	31·5
Wine	.	.	.	.	21·0
Vinegar	.	.	.	.	63·6
Red Wine of 9 degrees	.	.	.	.	23·0
Dried Fruit	.	.	.	.	26·0

In the case of meat the tax on slaughtering forms an important constituent element in the price paid by the consumer. The anticipated yield from this tax in the present year is estimated at 450 million francs.

Although the system of indirect taxes levied on articles of consumption is also applied to certain products of industry there can be no question that it is agricultural produce which bears the heaviest burden. Herein lies one important source of the divergency between agricultural and industrial prices, which has nothing whatever to do with the higher proportion of fixed capital involved in the production of industrial goods as compared with agricultural commodities. The higher incidence of indirect taxation on agricultural produce is, in fact, one of the main reasons, though of course not the sole reason, for the lower standard of living of the peasantry as compared with wage-earners in industry. To the extent that the peasantry are able to claim a greater voice in the direction of national policy (assuming such a position be reached at some future date), it is to be expected that radical changes will be brought about in the sphere of indirect taxation.



As regards direct taxation of agricultural profits reforms are already under discussion which may bear important fruit as times goes on. It has for some time been the accepted practice in the case of income-tax on profits made in commerce and industry to draw a distinction between the large enterprises, on the one hand, and small businesses on the other. While the former are assessed on their audited figures, which are liable to verification by the authorities, the small business man is allowed to pay, if he so wishes, a fixed sum, and is not required to submit his accounts. Up to the present time no similar distinction has been made in taxing agricultural profits, and however large a farming enterprise may be no statement of account is demanded. Consequently agricultural profits remain to a high degree conjectural. It has been pointed out, however, that the keeping of accurate accounts, while it is almost an impossibility for the small farmer, has become an absolute necessity on large farms, and it is claimed that the time has come when agricultural profits should be treated in the same way as industrial and commercial profits, and that large farmers should be required to disclose their actual profits on which they would then pay the appropriate tax. It would appear that such a reform would be to the advantage of the small man who, at present, probably has to pay proportionately more than his neighbour in a larger way of business.

Only in the degree to which the basic economic problems which have been examined are found to be capable of satisfactory solution will it be possible to think in terms of a general and substantial rise in the cultural level of the peasantry. Yet such a rise is long overdue. It is becoming a commonplace to dwell on the sharp contrast between the outward beauties of rural surroundings and the real poverty and squalor which characterise the lives of a large

part of the rural population. We in Great Britain have heard much of this subject, but in France similar contrasts can be established with even more truth. Few countries can show lovelier rural settings, greater variety in their village architecture, more pleasing memorials of the past in the way of fine châteaux, bridges, ecclesiastical buildings of one kind and another. Behind a façade of outward beauty, however, life can be singularly drab. So long as his, or her, life is one long grind to make ends meet, the peasant man or woman has little time to spare for those things which make for a full and joyous existence.

First and foremost is the problem of education. Although, as has been stated, education is by law universal and compulsory for children of both sexes in France between the ages of five and fourteen<sup>1</sup> in the country districts it often happens that the law is evaded under the stress of economic necessity.

An acquaintance who lives in the depths of the country in the Nièvre Department tells me that in the district lack of adequate boots, trousers, and so forth, is continually being pleaded as the reason why children are not sent to school. The Academy's inspector on being consulted ruled that such reasons were valid. My informant assured me that the percentage of non-attendance is high, and that teachers freely recognised the adverse effects of malnutrition in retarding scholastic development. It was frequently the case that badly nourished children failed, year after year, to reach the requisite standard for promotion, and so remained in the lower classes right up to the time of leaving school.

School-buildings in country places are, with few exceptions, antiquated, dreary, and ill-lit. The school material

<sup>1</sup> The school leaving-age was raised by the Blum Government from thirteen to fourteen years.

leaves much to be desired, text-books are in urgent need of revision, and the whole question of teaching personnel is one demanding drastic reform.

Facilities for secondary and advanced education are largely denied to the children of peasants, scholarships being limited in number. Without the aid of a scholarship it is only in rare cases that a peasant household can afford to send a child away to complete its education at a distant centre.

Secondary education does not take sufficient account of the fact that France is largely an agricultural country. The proportion of pupils in secondary schools who come from the country districts is very low, and the type of education imparted bears little or no relation to the problems of those whose future lies on the land.

In the sphere of higher education it is true that something was being done in the years immediately succeeding the close of the War to make it possible for the children of the less prosperous peasantry to secure a professional education:

“The Institute of National Agronomy at Paris, although it has always been difficult of access to students without private means, did nevertheless welcome several sons of small cultivators. Parents, in fact, made considerable sacrifices in order to endow at any rate one of their boys with a better agricultural training. And, what is more important, those who passed out from the Institute, as well as those from the other agricultural colleges . . . were able immediately to find employment. They were greatly in demand and were given key positions in the sphere of agricultural life and organisation.”<sup>1</sup>

Such modest signs of progress were of brief duration. The Agronomical Institute enrolled 120 new students in 1929. In 1935 it accepted less than half that number, and

<sup>1</sup> *Le Monde Agricole et la Paix*, p. 85.

in that year only eighteen of those passing out secured posts at all commensurate with their qualifications. During the period of deflation the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture was cut repeatedly and fell from one thousand million francs in 1932 to a bare quarter of this sum in 1936. Although French agriculture is, both in relation to other branches of production, and absolutely, well ahead of our own in importance, the present personnel of the Ministry is only a fourth of that of the corresponding British Department.

Such facts indicate very clearly the leeway that has obviously got to be made up if the rural population is to obtain the educational facilities which are a *sine qua non* for progress in the country districts.

A Swiss professor of agriculture recently wrote *à propos* of his visit to an agricultural estate in the Deux Sèvres on which he had worked fifty years earlier, that

“the alterations made to the old buildings and the new buildings alike bear witness to such a spirit of economy, that, compared with Switzerland, one has the impression that one is dealing with a rural proletariat.”

It is only too true that the standard of housing in French villages is sadly behind the times and cannot be compared with what has been accomplished in countries where the claims of the countryside have received a normal degree of recognition.

The old regional culture that characterised the various parts of France, the picturesque costumes, dances and other forms of social activity are fast disappearing. Nothing of equal value has yet taken their place.

“In the days when I was living there”, writes Professor Laur in the article on the Deux-Sèvres already quoted, “the people lived and were housed very simply. But life

rested on a solid basis of old customs and traditions. It is very obvious that in the interval the products of the cheap Paris stores have invaded the peasants' dwelling tending frequently to assimilate the outward emblems of the countryman's existence to those of the proletarian in the town.

"Typical in this respect is the disappearance of the head-dress formerly worn by all the women and by which one could tell whether they were married or single, and from what village they hailed. . . . In Brittany a young country-woman told me that in that province also the old head-dress was in process of disappearing. The townsman and the official, she added, regarded women who wore it as being in a lower class, who should make way for the ladies dressed in the city mode. The *coiffe* is no longer worn lest the wearer should be classed as a mere peasant."

Professor Laur goes on to remark that the same tendency to look down on the peasant prevailed for a period in Switzerland. It had eventually given way to a new respect for the cultivator now that he had learned the value of organisation and through it had found an effective means for improving his status.

Such, in broad outline, are the problems awaiting solution in the French countryside. On their successful solution the fate of nearly twenty million human beings directly depends. Is it really possible that a population as large as this can continue to live by the pursuit of agriculture within the present boundaries of France? And if so can it live not as now in insecurity and drudgery but well, able to have and to enjoy all that this present age is able to offer in the way of material comfort and cultural amenities?

In theory at least there would seem no reason why it should not be possible. The soil of France is rich, its full potential is manifestly far from having been developed as

yet. The peasant population is sober, laborious, and thrifty. All would seem to depend upon how quickly the French peasant will be able to discover for himself the road he must follow in order that at long last he may come into his own. That in turn may prove to depend on the help which will be afforded him by other categories of citizens, particularly the industrial proletariat, whose political education is at an altogether higher stage of advancement than his own.

“The French nation,” writes Professor Laur, “has a heavy debt towards its peasantry to liquidate, and one of its most important tasks is to improve the professional organisation of the peasant, to develop agricultural technique, to ensure just prices for agricultural products, to safeguard and re-vitalise peasant culture.”<sup>1</sup>

But in the first instance the future lies in the hands of the peasants themselves. Just how far they have progressed along the road which will lead to their eventual emancipation from insecurity, unending toil, and their present cheerless environment remains to be discussed in the concluding chapters.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Association Agricole*, No. 22 of 1936.

## CHAPTER V

### TOWARDS A SOLUTION

#### (i) *The Growth of Economic Co-operation*

THE ANALYSIS OF the structure of French rural society undertaken in the three preceding chapters has brought out the existence of certain differences between the agricultural population of France and our own. These differences, it has been shown, are substantial. Greatest of all, no doubt, is the existence in France, but not in this country, of an overwhelmingly preponderant stratum of medium and small cultivators who own not only the movable instruments of production but the soil as well, with its field-works and buildings. Conversely, the wealthy industrialist, financier, or *rentier* who in England so frequently figures in the subsidiary rôle of country squire, and in that capacity finds himself intimately concerned with the prosperity of agriculture, is far less common in France.

Now it is generally acknowledged that in both countries for several generations it has been such people who have played the predominant rôle in political life. In England, despite all the criticism amounting often to charges of the neglect and even betrayal of agriculture by successive governments, it is nevertheless broadly true that the land has somehow been kept in cultivation without any apparent direct effort on the grand scale being made by the actual cultivators to ensure that governmental policy is being influenced in their favour. Both in the House of Lords

and the House of Commons there has always been a landowning interest of sufficient strength to ensure that, whatever vicissitudes British agriculture may for the moment be encountering, at some stage national policy will be bent or modified so as to rescue agriculture wherever its plight is becoming intolerable.

Nowhere perhaps can this be seen more clearly than in very recent history. At a time when an agrarian crisis was sweeping the entire world and the prices of agricultural products were tumbling headlong, a new policy of protection and market-control was introduced in England regardless of the repercussions elsewhere, some of which have been extremely serious. Possibly considerations of national defence played their part in bringing about this change of policy, but it is clear that it was also in large measures due to the very powerful voice which the landowning interest is able to raise in the counsels of the State.

There has been nothing comparable to this in French history. If the great mass of agricultural producers in France have been able to keep their barque afloat amidst the strong currents of nineteenth and twentieth century economic expansion, it has not been so much with the aid of, but in opposition to, those major industrial and commercial forces which have taken a leading part in shaping French policy.

In the solutions which have been sought to the many and varied problems of peasant life and existence which were examined in the preceding chapter there can be little doubt that development has lain along the line of association for economic ends as well as for political action. The history of rural France in the last half-century is largely the record of the successful emergence, despite great obstacles, of powerful economic associations of the peasant



producers, associations which, though they may seem less all-embracing than the corresponding institutions of some of the smaller countries of Europe such as Denmark, Holland, and Switzerland, nevertheless have no sort of parallel in Britain.

Association of the agricultural producer in defence of his economic interests is of comparatively recent date in France. It is true that in the Middle-Ages the influence of guild ideas spread outward to some extent from the towns into the countryside. Thus as M. Augé-Laribé points out<sup>1</sup>

“associations have been in existence in the agricultural profession for some centuries. Provence and Roussillon were familiar in medieval times with associations of cultivators for the purpose of instituting and maintaining irrigation canals, and which made use of the term ‘*syndics*’ to denote the managers of these enterprises.”

The cheese-making co-operatives known as *fruitières* in the Jura and Franche-Comté were in existence as far back as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the extreme south-west, in the Landes, owners of stock evolved a scheme of mutual assurance against mortality amongst their animals to which the terms *cotises* and *consorses* belong, and which suggest that the participants paid in some regular form of contribution into a common fund.

Amongst the wine-growers of Touraine there existed *confréries de St. Vincent*, which were again some kind of mutual benefit society, while in certain parts of the country, notably the Auvergne and the Bourbonnais, the land was cultivated in common by groups of peasant families bound

<sup>1</sup> *Syndicats et Co-opératives Agricoles*, by Augé-Laribé (Armand Colin, Paris, 1926).

by ties of kinship as still happens to-day in some parts of the Balkans.

Much of this primitive economic organisation failed to survive the changes wrought in French national life by the development of modern industrialisation and the prevalence of a spirit of intense individualism. For many years subsequent to the Revolution of 1789-92, the large-scale re-distribution of land amongst many new owners which then occurred sufficed to solve the immediate problems of existence.

It was only as the nineteenth century advanced, and a succession of factors began operating to their disadvantage, that the peasants in France were driven by force of circumstances to take once more the path of economic association which their forbears had almost entirely forsaken.

Some of these factors were of the character of natural calamities, such as the advent of the pest *phylloxera* which ruined so many vineyards around the year 1875, or the great drought in the summer of 1893. Others were the consequences of a State economic policy directed by, and in the interests of, the new class of industrialists, who required cheap raw materials for their factories and cheap food for their workpeople. France's sheep farms, her fibres and vegetable oils, were sacrificed so as to admit in the interests of the textile trade cotton from the southern States of America and wool from Australia and elsewhere. The absence of protection in the second half of the nineteenth century for wheat and other cereals, placed the home grower at a fearful disadvantage *vis-d-vis* competitors who were tapping the virgin resources of the prairie lands of the New World. In turn foreign competition rendered imperative the resort to more intensive methods of cultivation. The purchase of fertilisers, and of machines to replace

to some extent older methods of farming which relied so greatly on manual labour, became an important item in peasant budgets. But the peasant, ignorant of values in these matters, and dispersed, fell an easy prey to wide-awake manufacturers, eager for profit, and their no more scrupulous agents.

Modern history in the matter of organisation by the peasants for economic ends really begins with the attempt to secure fertilisers on more favourable terms through collective buying. The first big step forward is marked by the passing of the law on Association or Syndicates on March 21st, 1884.

During nearly a century the right of association in France had legally been in abeyance, for as a safeguard against subversive activities on the part of supporters of the *Ancien Régime*, a law was passed in 1791 forbidding the formation of associations, and this with slight modification had persisted through all the political changes of the nineteenth century.

The law of 1884, due to the initiative of the celebrated statesman Waldeck-Rousseau, restored the right of association in the case of bodies formed for professional ends, for the "defence of economic, industrial, and commercial interests". In the intention of its promoters the new law was to give legal sanction to the formation of bodies to protect their respective interests by employers and employees in industry. In the course of the debate in the Senate, M. Oudet, Senator of the Doubs, suggested as an amendment that the words "and agricultural" should come after the word "commercial".

The amendment was accepted and became incorporated in the law. Almost immediately it had important results in the formation all over the country of agricultural syndicates. The legislative text was vague, and it is

understandable that people in all classes of the agricultural community should have read into it something that might be of benefit to their own particular interests.

In fact the earliest agricultural syndicates were formed on the initiative of individuals of widely varying political outlook. On the whole the maximum initiative was displayed by currents of opinion having a Catholic-social orientation. Syndicates of agriculturists, which included not only the working-farmer, but on the one side the landowner and on the other the labourer as well, were formed on the initiative of retired army officers, State officials, magistrates and other people of leisure who saw in them a possible means of putting into practice their economic conceptions which were inspired by the mediaeval guild-system. This is to say that the views harboured by the promoters of some of the early syndicates partook rather of the nature of efforts to harmonise the interests of the various classes interested in the exploitation of the land than of a desire to promote the purely economic interests of the industry as a whole.

But force of circumstances soon tended to assign to the newly-formed syndicates a more practical and immediate rôle.

“These Syndicates,” observes M. Augé-Laribé,<sup>1</sup> were, in the majority of cases, a kind of consumers’ co-operative, for it was more than anything as a means of struggle against the shameless cheating in the fertiliser trade, and in order to bring prices to a juster level that agriculturists began to unite. Their aim was to overcome the crisis in agriculture by improving time-worn technical methods and by seeking, through an increase in the yield of their harvests, a reduction in their costs of production. The immediate need was to introduce some measure of morality into the trade in fertilisers.”

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

An agricultural syndicate had been formed in the Seine-Inférieure as early as 1882. The foundation of the *Syndicat des Agriculteurs du Loir-et-Cher* dates from 1883. In 1884 syndicates were formed in four more departments, in the Ardennes in the extreme north, in Charente-Inférieure in the west, in the Vienne in the centre, and in Vaucluse in the Rhône valley.

Two years later a central organisation, the *Syndicat Central des Agriculteurs de France*, was established with headquarters in the capital. The same year witnessed the foundation of further departmental syndicates at Chartres, in the Ille-et-Vilaine, Manche, Pyrénées Orientales, Sarthe, and Deux-Sèvres.

The syndicates of the Aveyron, Cher, Côte d'Or, and Anjou, date from 1887; those of the Basses Pyrénées and Chalons-sur-Saône from 1888. The powerful *Union du Sud Est* was also founded in this year.

By 1890, either on private initiative, or through the intervention of the local officers of the Ministry of Agriculture (first appointed in 1879), practically every department in the country had one or more of these syndicates in existence. That they were playing an important part in bringing the fertiliser market under some measure of control is proved by the lengthy litigation that ensued as a result of the strenuous efforts made by commercial interests to debar the syndicates from undertaking trading operations on behalf of their members. These efforts were not successful and the syndicates continue to act to this day as the organisations through which large numbers of farmers provide themselves with their requirements in fertilisers, seed, machinery and the like, having this function either as their principal objective, or undertaking it merely as one branch of their activity. The law of March 12th, 1920, to which reference must be made again later in

another connection, enlarged the scope of the syndicates whose activities now cover a very varied field. A recent return of the Ministry of Labour in Paris put their number at 15,000, with a total membership of 1,910,000.

Their legal basis does not permit of the syndicates undertaking in any very complete form the functions of collective agencies of production. They are debarred from paying salaries to their officers, nor are they allowed to raise share-capital. They thus differ from the full-fledged co-operative, but before dealing with the history of the latter, it is necessary to say something about the credit institutions, without whose existence the growth of co-operation amongst agricultural producers would hardly have been possible.

With the changes in economic conditions which took place in the nineteenth century it became no longer possible for the cultivator to carry on his labours in reliance on his own unaided resources. The practice of producing for the market rather than for domestic consumption has placed the peasant producer before the necessity of obtaining from outside sources money or credit which will enable him to instal himself on his farm in the first instance, and thereafter to meet his requirements in the way of seed, fertilisers, labour, etc., until he can recoup himself from the proceeds of his harvest.

In countries where the farmer had sufficient security to offer, the commercial banks were ready enough to come to his assistance in the matter. Such has not been the case, however, in countries such as France, where small-scale production is the rule. Towards the middle of the last century a Land Bank, the *Crédit Foncier*, was launched. It proved of small use to the farmer:

“This great institution, the *Crédit Foncier*, entirely failed to realise what was hoped from it. . . . Those

who resort to the *Crédit Foncier* do so in order to buy land and houses; for most of the milliards of the *Crédit Foncier* are sunk in urban property. What interests us are loans for the improvement of the land. . . . This was realised and a little later another great institution was created in France—the *Crédit Agricole*. This one had the definite objective of lending money to agriculturists. It succeeded no better. Why? Because, as we shall see presently, the sole solution of the problem of agricultural credit . . . is personal security. Now for this form of credit, it is no longer possible to think in terms of one big institution, but on the contrary of numerous local establishments which are familiar with the needs and solvency of borrowers.”<sup>1</sup>

This, in fact, has been the manner in which the French peasant has finally solved the problem of credit in so far as a final solution has as yet been achieved.

The history of mutual credit banking amongst peasants does not start in France, but rather in Germany, where it took two forms. In one of these which owes its origin to a burgomaster, Raiffeisen, of austere Protestant principles, the peasants who combine to form their own bank are not required to put up capital, and indeed are debarred from doing so. In their corporate dealings with the outside world they accept joint responsibility, each on behalf of all the others. No loans are granted except for production purposes. The funds of the bank are in the first instance advanced by the members for the specific loan that has been granted. Only gradually is a permanent fund constituted out of fines, the entrance-fees of members, out of interest charges, etc. Interest-rates are fixed by the members themselves, and no salaried staff is employed.

Somewhat later the second type, known as the Schultze-Delitsch banks, came into existence. These were very

<sup>1</sup> *Les Associations Co-opératives Agricoles*—Charles Gide, 1926.

different. Members subscribe the capital in shares of large denomination. Loans may be for any purpose, there is no limit to the number of members, nor is enquiry made into their suitability provided only they are able to subscribe the requisite capital. Long-term loans are not granted. The liabilities of members are mainly in respect of the capital subscribed in shares.

In both types, however, the principle of common responsibility, and the democratic system of management and control justify their being regarded as genuine co-operative institutions.

Mutual credit banking came late into France by way of Italy, where the Schultze-Delitsch type of bank was already well-established. The first bank was set up in Mentone, near the Italian border in 1882, and the movement quickly spread to Marseilles where M. Eugène Rostand (father of the dramatist Edmond Rostand) played a leading part in the establishment of the *Centre Fédératif du Crédit Populaire*.

In 1893, M. Durand, a lawyer practising at Lyon, and a Catholic, founded the *Fédération des Caisses Rurales*, which were of the Raiffeisen type, and with a strong tendency to be confessional, confined to practising Catholics alone. By 1925 there were altogether in France some 1,200 *caisses* of the Raiffeisen type with unlimited responsibility of the members. Of the earlier type there were at that date in addition some 700 separate institutions.

However, neither of these movements, whose essence in either case was their complete independence from outside assistance and control, has proved the form of mutual credit which has appealed to the great bulk of the French peasantry. They have both been outdistanced by the *Crédit Agricole Mutuel* established by the law of 1894, and that of 1899, which represents a new form, in which the



State (and through it the Bank of France) plays its share as will be subsequently explained.

As with credit, so with insurance (which is absolutely essential to the conduct of agricultural operations under modern conditions). The French small and middle farmers were and are precluded from recourse to commercial institutions unless they are prepared to pay premiums for most kinds of risk which are extremely onerous. The solution has been found in the development of mutual insurance societies, which are regulated mainly by the Viger Law of 1900. The system under which they function will be explained later.

The development of co-operative buying, processing, and selling societies has been mainly subsequent to the passing of the Law of August 5th, 1920, which first regulated them, and which at the same time made provision for the *Société d'intérêt collectif*, or public utility company, which has allowed societies to be established for supplying electricity and for other purposes, with the obligation to accept the general public as customers in addition to their own members. The legislation regarding agricultural co-operatives has been enlarged by such measures as the law of 1906 making provision for State loans to co-operatives, by a decree-law of 1935 (in which year there was also set up a statutory *Conseil Supérieur de la Coopération* to deal with all matters affecting the co-operatives) and by a further decree-law of the same year, which revised the system of "warranting" agricultural produce.<sup>1</sup>

Before examining in more detail how these various types of association are functioning at the present time,

<sup>1</sup> A 'warrant' is a document certifying that a given quantity of a specified kind of produce is held by the vendor at the purchaser's disposal

and the degree of their importance, something must be said of a quite different form of economic organisation in the countryside, to wit the trade-unions—by which the agricultural labourers seek to safeguard their wage-rates and conditions of labour.

Trade-unionism established itself only with great difficulty amongst the agricultural labourers. The principal reason for its slow growth is doubtless to be sought in the fact that the agricultural proletariat is extremely unstable. In past years few labourers expected to remain such to the end of their days. Rather they nourished the hope either of being able to buy land themselves which they could work, or of obtaining a government post carrying with it a promise of security, or possibly they looked forward to finding work at more remunerative wages in industry. Consequently they had the minimum incentive to combine in order to protect themselves in a situation which most of them regarded as temporary. Nevertheless some progress was made. At the outbreak of the Great War there were, according to Professor Gide, 628 agricultural trade-unions. Most of them did not survive after the War, but new ones were started, and at the time of the wave of strikes in French industry in May and June, 1936, which resulted in an unprecedented influx of new members into the unions, the agricultural unions also received a fillip. By the autumn there were over 1,200 unions grouped in the National Federation of Agricultural Workers, and the total membership from a paltry 8,000 at the beginning of the year had increased to over 180,000.

The General Confederation of Labour has not omitted to extend its organisation to the extremely important field of the technical experts employed in the agricultural industry. Until a year ago there was precious little in the

way of professional organisation amongst the university trained elements in agriculture. Those directly employed by the State had, it is true, their independent groupings. For instance, the staff of the Administration against Fraudulent Practices, of the Veterinary Service, the Departmental Inspectors of Agriculture each had their organisation. They existed on sufferance, for French law has not yet recognised the right of civil servants to organise in trade-unions, though they have long done so unofficially.

But in more recent times a powerful organisation which now numbers tens of thousands of qualified engineers and the like has been created in the bosom of the C.G.T. It is called the *Fédération des Ingénieurs, Techniciens, et Assimilés de l'Industrie* and is an extremely powerful body. More recently still, about the beginning of last year, a similar movement, again associated with the C.G.T., came into being in the agricultural sphere. There are in agriculture some 2,000 graduates of the central agricultural college, and altogether about 15,000 or perhaps 20,000 persons who may be reckoned as agricultural specialists of one kind and another. They are to be found in the employ of the State, of the semi-official organisations such as the Grain Office, of the syndicates and co-operatives, and of private companies and large-scale cultivators and processors. Considerable progress has already been achieved by the new organisation amongst this class. Its activities now extend to all the departments, it being known as the *Syndicat des Ingénieurs et Techniciens de l'Agriculture* (S.I.T.A.).

An older type of labour organisation still lingers here and there, described by M. Augé-Laribé under the general title of "labour co-operative" (*co-opérative de travail*), though as he does not fail to point out they are scarcely

deserving of the name. Such associations of day-labourers who work in gangs are familiar in Oriental countries. They were not unknown in England even within living memory. The gangs who worked on East Anglian farms and to which allusion is made by Karl Marx in *Capital* were in some cases still in existence at the commencement of the twentieth century. Clearly, however, the gang system is a survival from the time when routine labour was performed by hand. In these modern times the use of the machine for so many and so varied operations on the larger farms has made the employment of gangs of unskilled labourers an economic impossibility.

Having sketched thus briefly the origins of the various forms of association by which the cultivators have sought to safeguard their economic interests it is now possible to examine in greater detail what has actually been achieved up to the present time in this field. It will be evident in the course of this survey that the key question has been, and is, the question of credit. For this reason the type of association that suggests itself as the best starting-point for our enquiry into the present state of agricultural co-operation is the *Crédit Agricole Mutuel*, the institution created by the law of 1894.

Although this bank has from its inception enjoyed the use of funds put at its disposal by the State, and which have been greatly increased in more recent years, it is not, in the real sense of the word, a State institution. On the contrary its basic charter, as M. Maurice Palmade, the former Minister of Agriculture, has stated, is founded

“on the principle of autonomy. This autonomy . . . was essential if the notion, and the utilisation, of credit were to penetrate into the rural sphere. Peasant psychology in this matter is characterised by a feeling of confidence which is slow to develop, but which is

faithfully retained once it is established, provided always that it is not subjected to unexpected shocks, nor to departures from what is customary."

The *Crédit Agricole Mutuel* is federal in structure. In France itself, excluding Algeria and the colonies, it had, in 1934, 6,195 local branches. Each of these is autonomous. The capital is subscribed by the members (minimum 25 francs) who must be *bona-fide* agriculturists or artisans and the members elect their own board of management and officers. In many cases the operations of a mutual credit bank cover not one but two or more communes. Since in 1931 there were in all 33,960 communes in France having less than 1,500 inhabitants, it may be safely assumed that the number in which agriculture plays an important rôle does not greatly exceed that figure. It is evident, therefore, that the official *Crédit Agricole* must be accessible to a very large majority of the peasant cultivators. In addition there are many of the so-called "free" banks previously mentioned, their total number being possibly a third of the number given above of banks receiving State assistance.

It is owing to their intimate knowledge of local conditions and the standing of their borrowers that the management of these credit banks have been able to administer the funds entrusted to them so successfully. The funds at the disposal of a local bank are derived from the subscribed capital, the reserves, the deposits, and from advances made by the regional banks. Deposits are accepted from cultivators and artisans.

Loans granted by the credit banks are of three types:

*Long-term*, at 2 to 3 per cent interest for purchase of land by individuals or for establishing co-operative undertakings. These loans run for thirty years, the loan being gradually amortised by annual payments.

*Middle-term* for four to ten years to individual cultivators for the purchase of livestock, machinery, etc.

*Short-term* for the purchase of seed, fertiliser, store cattle etc. Short-term loans are repayable within six months.

Some of the local banks are very modest concerns. Only gradually does the peasant abandon the time-honoured *bas de laine* (woollen stocking) as the receptacle of his savings. In the large village of Bléré in the Cher valley, however, I was told on enquiring that the bank did sufficient business to necessitate its being kept open daily. A whole-time clerk was employed and deposits exceeded 4,000,000 francs (£40,000).

The total individual membership of the local credit banks on December 31st, 1935, was 576,269. A much larger number were however indirect customers by virtue of belonging to syndicates, co-operatives, and mutual insurance societies which dealt with these banks. Since the establishment of the *Office du Blé* in the summer of 1936 the whole of the marketed wheat crop is to be paid for through the agency of the *Crédit Agricole*. In this way many hundreds of thousands of cultivators will be brought within the scope of the banks' operations, if only for the purpose of drawing the money due to them.

The local banks are grouped by affiliation to regional banks, of which there were ninety-eight in 1935, some departments having more than one. The funds at the disposal of the regional banks are derived from their capital (held partly by individuals, partly by agricultural associations of one kind or another, and partly by the local banks), their reserves, their deposits, and from advances made to them by the central bank. In 1935 the subscribed capital of all these regional banks amounted to 209,342,348 francs, and their reserves to 259,049,255 francs.

## DEPOSITS IN REGIONAL BANKS

	<i>Sight</i>	<i>Terminal</i>	<i>Total</i>
31st December			
1932 . .	981,299,731	276,345,524	1,257,645,255
30th April			
1936 . .	858,598,769	242,631,072	1,101,229,841

A good example of a successful regional bank is the *Caisse Regionale de Crédit Agricole* of the Yonne Department which had a capital of 2,560,260 francs on December 31st, 1935. Its reserves amounted to nearly two million francs. Advances from the National Bank outstanding were just short of 19 million francs. Deposits amounted to nearly 12 million francs, the number of depositors (individual and collective) being 1,650. The Regional Bank of the Department of the Charente-Inférieure at the same date, with a slightly smaller capital, catered for 35 local banks whose total membership was 12,000. There were 7,500 borrowers of all categories and 700 individual and collective depositors.

The apex of the credit structure is the *Caisse Nationale de Crédit Agricole Mutuel* whose offices are in the Rue Casimir-Périer at Paris. The funds of the central bank have been created very largely by parliamentary action. In 1895, a sum of 40 million francs was put at its disposal by the Bank of France, and since 1926 four-sixths of that portion of the Bank of France's profits which accrue each year to the Government are added. On May 12th, 1936, the Crédit Mutuel had, since its inception, received advances totalling 1,518 million francs from this source. In addition treasury advances totalling a further 1,250 million francs have been approved by Parliament at various times. The central bank is also authorised to

receive in deposit unutilised balances of the regional banks, and (since 1926) deposits from individuals. At the close of 1935 the sum-total of deposits was 339,869,000 francs. Amongst the many services rendered by mutual credit to agriculture in France the provision of the means by which over 100,000 agricultural labourers have been enabled to acquire farms either as owners or as tenants is not the least striking. The *Crédit Agricole* has likewise been of invaluable assistance in the formation of the majority of co-operative enterprises, which have been able through its agency to raise a large part of the capital required to purchase their plant.

The principal risks against which the French cultivator insures himself by an application of the principle of mutuality are: Fire, Livestock Mortality, Hail, Accident in the course of work, and those other personal risks which are covered by State insurance schemes in the case of the less wealthy citizen, and which have been made applicable to peasants and artisans as well as wage-earners in industry.

“Agriculturists have concerned themselves with the problem of their mutual protection on the most favourable terms against the numerous and grave risks incident to their profession: Loss of livestock, fire, hail, accidents. Such is the purpose of the funds for mutual agricultural insurance. The law of July 4, 1900, commonly known as the *Loi Viger*, by freeing these institutions from the cumbersome provisions of the Company Law of 1867 created a rational and economic instrument at the service of cultivators and rural artisans for the apportionment of risks.

“Having no capital on which to pay dividends, managed on an entirely honorific basis, federated, and re-assured amongst themselves the local mutual societies whose present number exceeds 33,000, have, while



requiring relatively low premiums from their members, built up in the space of thirty-five years, either directly or through their re-assurance funds, considerable reserves. The remarkable success of mutual insurance, based on an organisation in three stages (local societies at the base, regional or departmental re-assurance institutions above them, and these last grouped in the *Caisses Nationales*) as originally applied to the risks of fire, and mortality amongst livestock, has encouraged its subsequent extension to protection against accidents at work and damage by hail.

"Local mutual insurance societies against fire at present number about 14,000. They are re-assured in seventy-five regional or departmental institutions, which are themselves affiliated to two re-insurance institutions of national scope, the one a subsidiary of the *Fédération Nationale de la Mutualité et de la Coopération agricoles*; the other a subsidiary of the *Société des Agriculteurs de France*. Agricultural capital insured against fire through the medium of the mutual societies has reached a total of over 44 milliard francs.<sup>1</sup>

"For insurance against mortality amongst livestock 7,000 local societies are reassured with 70 regional or departmental institutions, in their turn re-assured nationally by two separate institutions. The mutual societies are the most important organisations in France covering this particular risk.

"Mutual insurance against occupational accident has undergone a considerable development during the last ten years. To-day 11,000 local societies, reassured with sixty regional or departmental establishments assist in the application to agriculture of the legislative provisions relating to accidents in the course of work.

"Insurance against hail is more recent: the number of local mutual societies is 2,000, of departmental or regional thirty.

"Lastly the agricultural mutualities have taken part in the setting up of professional organisations in the

<sup>1</sup> About £300,000,000.—N. H.

form of mutual assistance societies charged with applying in the agricultural sphere the law relating to social insurance.”<sup>1</sup>

The rapid extension of mutual insurance has undoubtedly proved an inestimable boon to the agriculturist, particularly the small-holder. Insurance of this type is far cheaper than anything of the kind available commercially. Thus in the Yonne members of the mutual insurance society against fire pay premiums which are only about 50 per cent of those demanded by the private companies, and it is anticipated that at the present rate it will be possible in twenty years' time to grant free insurances to members whose policies are still in force. In a department in which there are 486 communes there were in 1934 no less than 274 fire insurance mutual offices insuring altogether 12,585 members' property of the value of 470 million francs. In that year 328,926 francs were paid in premiums and 131,000 francs were paid out in claims. It has already been possible to reduce the premiums paid on old-established policies. A not unimportant characteristic of mutual insurance is the promptitude with which claims can be settled. I was told of a recent case in the Yonne when a farmer was fully indemnified for the total loss of his buildings by fire within twenty-four hours of the outbreak.

As has already been pointed out<sup>2</sup> many cultivators keep only one or two animals; a horse, a pair of oxen, a milch-cow. The death or even the impairment of value of one of these may be an extremely serious blow to the owner. It can well be imagined, therefore, what a boon the practice of mutual insurance has been since, after

<sup>1</sup> From an unpublished report for which I am indebted to M. Vimeux, the general secretary of the *Fédération de la Mutualité et de la Coopération agricoles*.—N. H.

<sup>2</sup> p. 40.

much hesitation, the small peasants finally decided to adopt it. In the Var, for instance, the largest mutual insurance society had 3,724 members in 1934, grouped in 152 sections, but the total number of animals insured was only 4,254. Some 87 per cent, therefore, of the members had only one animal to insure. Not only is the entire cost of the animal made good in the case of death with the minimum of delay, but for an animal 70 per cent incapacitated for work compensation is also granted. Premiums are calculated at  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent on four-fifths of the market value of the animal for insurance against death, and a tenth added for the incapacity risk. At the end of 1934 this society had in force policies on livestock worth 17 million francs. Its reserve fund amounted to three-quarters of a million francs.

The questions of finance and credit having been solved through membership of the local *Crédit agricole*; protection against the various risks incidental to agricultural operations having been secured through the medium of the various mutual insurance societies, the cultivator is still left with many problems which he may be incapable of solving by his isolated action. Amongst these is the problem of acquiring on satisfactory terms such necessities as seed, fertilisers, and machinery. The trade in the first-named is still almost entirely in private hands; the same is true of machinery, and also of the distribution of fertilisers, although their production is largely controlled by the State.

It is here that the advantages of association have become particularly evident to the French peasant. A great majority of the 15,000 agricultural syndicates make the collective purchase of cultivators' requirements their primary aim. There are in addition about 150 co-operative societies formed with the same object, the latter, by virtue of possessing a working-capital, being able to conduct

operations on a bigger scale and for a longer period. At Auxerre I was able to inspect the spacious warehouse of the departmental co-operative. This has eleven branch dépôts and buys for 333 syndicates in the communes. In 1934 it had the very respectable turnover of 15 million francs.

In 1927 a co-operative of supply was set up in the Dijon area to the south of Auxerre, sponsored by somewhat different interests. This had established fourteen branch dépôts by 1934. It procured for the organisations and individuals who supported it a very wide range of necessities, extending far beyond the range of strictly agricultural requirements. Business turn-over, which exceeded 10 million francs in a year, was on a scale sufficient to justify the employment of an agent as far away as Marseilles for the purchase of cake, etc., in bulk quantities.

In defence of their interests cultivators in some parts of France have also formed syndicates as a protection against fraud. Certain districts, for instance, have the exclusive privilege of marketing their wines under certificates of origin as, for instance, Champagne, Médoc, etc., and vigilance is required to guard against attempts on the part of producers who have no title to make fraudulent use of these distinctive appellations.

A further type of syndicate is that formed to combat agricultural pests, insects, birds, etc. In 1934 there were about 350 such in the Charente-Inférieure alone, where they are grouped in a departmental federation. In the Var, which has the third largest forest area of all the departments, considerable progress has been made in grouping the forestal owners (of whom there are more than 33,000) in syndicates for the purpose of combating forest fires, which cause great damage in these parts. The federation, which groups some twenty syndicates, now carries out

precautionary measures over about a quarter of all the privately-owned forests.

In the actual cultivation of the soil voluntary association, for reasons which must be discussed later, plays little part. In the work of harvesting the grain crop it however makes its reappearance. Syndicates are formed for conducting threshing-operations, presumably with a view to arranging collective contracts with the proprietors of machines. There are, too, threshing co-operatives to the number of about 1,800 which themselves own and operate the necessary machinery. Describing those in the Charente-Inférieure M. André Douence observes:

“Of the 246 which existed in 1934, 157 are affiliated to a federation formed in 1925. The large number of these co-operatives is explained by the simplicity of their management and again by the fact that the threshing-season lasting only a couple of months or so it is easy for those who undertake their management to give the necessary time to the work.

“The only pitfall to avoid in the creation of these groups, which otherwise are simplicity itself, is having too many members, which occasions too great delays in threshing the crop of members whose turn comes last.”

It is again the simpler type of organisation, the syndicates, which has proved its adaptability to the purposes of the stock-breeder and the milk-recorder. Even in a region such as the Charente-Inférieure where (apart from the salt-marshes of the *Marais*) cattle are kept for dairying, and there is little actual breeding, there were recently some fifty breeding syndicates, mostly possessing one bull apiece. It is interesting to note, by the way, the preponderance of the Normandy breed in these operations (forty-two of the fifty syndicates were breeding from Normandy bulls). The way these syndicates work is as follows: All syndicates

in the department who wish to purchase a bull club together to despatch a buying commission to go the rounds of the principal cattle fairs which are held yearly in Normandy. The bulls are loaded on a railway truck after purchase. On arrival in the department they are handed over to the syndicates who have bought them at a public function, and are paid for by a levy on members according to the number of cows they possess. Milk recording syndicates in the Charente-Inférieure number twelve, with a total of eighty members owning about 1,000 cows. Apart from the actual recording their work is largely educational, aiming to encourage proper feeding, hygienic milking, etc. They also certify the milk-producing qualities and pedigree of heifers and cows bred from sound, selected stock.

Up to the present time co-operative principles have probably received their widest application in the sphere of marketing the wheat crop. Prior to the setting up of the *Office du Blé* in the autumn of 1936, there were in existence about a thousand co-operative societies undertaking the storage and marketing of grain. It was then calculated that the number would have to be quadrupled if the provisions of the new law were to be successfully applied in the spirit as well as the letter. There is no doubt that a great many new co-operatives have been created in the intervening months. Of those which existed previously some merely rented a warehouse for storage purposes, but this was by no means always the case. Many co-operative societies have their own silos. I saw one of them at Auxerre, situated on the banks of the Yonne river, which is navigable for large barges. It had a capacity of 2,000 tons, and was connected with the co-operative flour-mill next door. The mill is by far the best customer of the silo, but large quantities of grain are also sold to the big commercial

mills of the Paris region. M. Rouget, the manager of these enterprises, informed me that the co-operative had achieved a wide renown amongst the peasantry in the bumper year 1933, when it was able to dispose of the entire crop of its members, whereas many non-co-operators had experienced the utmost difficulty in finding a market, and had, in fact, been left with considerable surpluses on their hands.

In the Yonne department besides the Batardeau plant at Auxerre there is another co-operative flour-mill at Brisson. There are co-operative mills in a few other departments as well. The Batardeau mill has a productive capacity of about 12 tons of flour daily. The machinery is of the latest type, supplied by the Swiss firm of Buhler. It is electrically operated, and one mechanic and a couple of warehousemen are all the personnel needed other than on the clerical side.

In some parts of France, as, for instance, the Gers and the Charente-Inférieure, co-operation extends to the further stage in the processing of wheat represented by its transformation from flour into bread. La Rochelle, in the last-named department, is the headquarters of a group of co-operative bakeries, the first of which was established as long ago as 1852, and which now total 215, with 30,000 members.

If agriculture is conceived of as an industry, as is now generally the case, little analysis is needed to establish the fact that, like other industries, its conduct requires the bringing together of the four constituents; plant, labour, power and raw materials.

The raw materials differ according to the particular product that is in question. Whatever the type of farming, however, whether the product be vegetable or animal, the constituents of an adequate nourishment are not generally found in satisfactory quantities in the soil itself, and

this category of raw material the farmer has usually to procure from commercial sources.

Similarly in regard to seed, which can be regarded as an essential raw material in wheat production, etc. The supply of seed is still almost wholly in private hands, but there would not appear to be any valid reason why co-operative principles should not be applied to its production. Indeed a beginning has been made, though on an extremely modest scale. Existing co-operatives for the production, selection, testing, etc. of seed are located near Paris, in the Seine-et-Marne and Seine-et-Oise. There are others again in the Pas-de-Calais.

Another requisite of modern agriculture is power. As was shown in Chapter III, the electrification of the countryside has made considerable progress. It is the exception, however, to find electric current used by the small and medium cultivator other than for lighting, unless used co-operatively in processing-plants of one kind or another. Nevertheless despite great difficulties a beginning has been made, and electricity has been brought to light many a farm as a result of co-operative enterprise. The legal position in France is such that it is impracticable to supply electricity only to members of a co-operative. Consequently the existing fifty or more electrical supply societies have actually been set up in the form of public utility companies. They can nevertheless be regarded as genuine peasant enterprises of a collective character. Some 1,200 communes are already thus supplied, the number of individual consumers being about 350,000.

Syndicates of peasants formed for the purpose of carrying out schemes for land improvement are to be found in many parts of the country. The collective irrigation projects which were successfully carried into execution in Roussillon as far back as the Middle Ages have already



been mentioned. Scarcely less ancient are the associations in the marshes of La Vendée which undertake the ditching and drainage of this rich coastal region. Forty-three local organisations are grouped in a departmental union, thus achieving co-ordination of effort, and in recent years the work has been carried out not only by hand but with the aid of special machines adapted to the work.

Co-operation for processing and marketing is far from being confined to cereals. It has made great strides amongst wine-growers, where the small isolated producer is at a particular disadvantage. Not only is the old-fashioned method of pressing the grape laborious in the extreme; it is also extremely difficult to dispose satisfactorily of wine produced in small quantities. Nor can the individual grower resort to the improved technical methods by which wines of standard quality can now be produced.

The co-operative wine-presses, of which there are now some 600, utilise the very latest plant, plant which is often expensive. Quite a small wine-press, with which I am personally familiar, cost its co-operative owners nearly 900,000 francs to erect. Many are of much greater capacity. In recent times these co-operative enterprises have been found so successful that they have spread from regions where only the ordinary wine is made to the districts, such as Champagne and Burgundy, where wines of superior quality are produced. It is difficult to estimate the precise extent to which the processing of the grape into wine is now performed co-operatively. No doubt it varies widely between district and district. In the Var where there are ninety-three co-operatives producing 1,200,000 hectolitres of wine, some 16,000 growers are co-operators, which is about half the total number in the department. There are, however, few departments in which co-operation has been so greatly developed.

A natural extension of co-operation in the processing of the grape has been the establishment of co-operative distilleries. There are altogether about 350 of these, mostly located in the south. Some of the most interesting developments of this nature have been in the Charente area, the home of genuine 'Cognac'. Here there are some 1,500 members of the various co-operative distilleries which have been compelled, owing to the hostility of the big private shippers, to form their own selling organisation—'Unicoop'. Unicoop bottles daily some 8,000 litres, and maintains a stock of 17,500 gallons of brandy maturing in its vats.

Other forms of distillation, such as perfumes, alcohol from beet, and from potatoes, and the apple-jack distilled from cider-apples in Normandy and sold as 'Calvados' are likewise undertaken, here and there, co-operatively.

Olive-growers have taken enthusiastically to co-operation in the processing of their crops. There are some seventy co-operatives, each with its own oil-press. The capital value of their plant is estimated at the considerable figure of 20 million francs. The olive-oil co-operatives, with a total membership of 20,000, handle about a third of the entire crop and produce in a normal year about 3,500 tons of oil. Co-operation is now spreading to fruit-growers and market gardeners, but in these fields it is still in its infancy. There are a few market-garden co-operatives round Paris, and one established in 1936 in the Ile-de-Ré for the marketing of early potatoes and asparagus was immediately successful. The possibilities for the development of co-operative marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables are no doubt very great, particularly if close contact be maintained with the consumers' co-operatives in the large centres.

An instance of successful co-operation amongst market-gardeners is the society founded in 1921 at La Seyne on

the outskirts of Toulon. This society markets in the town early potatoes, peas, tomatoes, carrots, spinach, lettuce, etc., on behalf of its members. In the space of fifteen years it has not only repaid a loan of 35,000 francs to the *Crédit Agricole* but has a reserve fund amounting to 80,000 francs. Its growth may be studied in the figures given below:

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Members</i>	<i>Turnover (in francs)</i>
1921 . . .	42	206,615
1926 . . .	320	503,510
1933 . . .	787	1,413,154
1934 . . .	811	1,602,601

In the south-west there is a co-operative, the *Co-operative fruitière du Bas-Limousin et du Haut-Quercy*, which specialises in the preparation of walnuts for the Paris market, but it cannot be said that the extremely important field of fruit-grading has been covered as yet by the co-operative movement, and fruit-production in France remains in a state of woeful disorganisation.

In the sphere of animal husbandry the existence of breeding and milk-recording syndicates has already been noticed. A far more important development has been the growth of co-operative creameries and dairies for the pasteurisation of milk and the production of butter and cheese, and, as a by-product, casein from skim-milk.

Co-operation in the manufacture of cheese in the south-western districts, in the Jura and the Franche Compté is of very ancient date. The Gruyère type of cheese which is the local speciality, is of such a size that few dairy-farmers are able to produce sufficient milk to undertake the production of these cheeses single-handed. But in recent times the *fruitières* of the Jura have been paralleled by many new co-operatives in other parts of the country

where one or more varieties of cheese are made, as well, possibly, as a certain quantity of butter. The co-operative creamery at Auxerre, for instance, which collects milk within a radius of about twelve miles round the town, manufactures ten different kinds of cheese, as well as butter and cascin, and supplies 60 per cent of the 25,000 litres of fresh milk consumed daily in Auxerre, and in addition delivers milk to the Paris market.

The biggest extension of the creamery co-operative movement has been in the Charentes and Poitou. In this area alone there are 140 creameries producing butter, grouping 80,000 producers who own 220,000 cows. About 20,000 tons of butter are produced.

“The co-operative dairies of the Charente-Inférieure are quite the most striking example of the co-operative spirit in these parts. *Phylloxera* having destroyed the vines and sown ruin and dismay in the locality, a humble farmer near Surgères, Eugène Birand, pointed out the road to be taken and salvation came through the industrial exploitation of grassland by co-operative dairies. His idea must have seemed revolutionary at first, since he proposed the replacement of the now useless vineyards by the creation in their place of artificial meadows, and thereby the production of milk in a region where there was little natural grassland. To Eugène Birand belongs the credit of getting his idea accepted and taken up and plans for the co-operative processing of milk for the manufacture of butter set on foot. His plans owed much of their success to a recent invention; the centrifugal separator. Thus the first co-operative creamery was founded in November 1887 at Chaillé by Eugène Birand who was its first president. . . . Soon the co-operators were congratulating themselves on being able to get 14 to 20 centimes the litre for their milk in place of the 6 or 8 centimes the private traders were offering. The power of example was contagious, and the movement extended rapidly throughout the

two Charente departments and also the neighbouring departments of Deux-Sèvres and La Vendée."<sup>1</sup>

To-day there are some 1,625 co-operatives in France engaged in the manufacture of cheese. The number producing butter is over 500.

In some cases as an adjunct to creameries, piggeries have been created which are occasionally run as separate co-operatives. These piggeries provide an alternative to the production of cascin as a means of disposing of the skimmed milk.

The Charente creameries often undertake the collection of eggs from their members as well as milk.

At Saintes in this region there is also an egg-and-poultry co-operative which is quite independent. It was formed in close collaboration with the local consumers' co-operative, which has many agriculturists amongst its 40,000 members. This co-operative, which was founded as recently as 1931, already handles about five million eggs yearly in addition to about 30 tons liveweight of poultry and rabbits.

Amongst sheep-farmers examples of co-operation for the purpose of marketing meat and wool are not numerous.

Taking it all in all it is hardly a matter of doubt that the French peasantry will tend to an increasing extent to associate in order to realise concrete economic ends. The movement towards increasing co-operation cannot but be accelerated by the recent development of organised propagandist and educational effort in this direction. In the Côte d'Or the agricultural syndicates have long been paying attention to the technical instruction of the young farmer, and in 1932 a syndicate for the promotion of

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Twenty-fourth Congress of the *Fédération Nationale de la Mutualité et de la Co-opération Agricoles*.

agricultural studies was formed, which covers the Doubs, Haute-Saône, Jura and other departments. In the first few years 1,658 took the correspondence courses arranged by this organisation, which publishes its own periodical bulletin, *L'ami des Jeunes*.

In the Yonne courses have been conducted the last few winters for young agriculturists with a view to training cadres for the various mutual and co-operative enterprises of the peasantry in that department. The announcement of the course for the winter of 1936-37 reads:

“*The Élités Rurales* courses in agricultural mutuality and co-operation, the aim of which is the training of managers and accountants on behalf of the various agricultural associations in the department, will begin their next session at Auxerre in the second half of November. A maximum of forty pupils can be accepted for the session.

“The courses take place at the *Bourse de l'Agriculture* at Auxerre once, or twice, weekly, on Tuesdays and Fridays. Pupils receive an allowance of 10 francs for each day of attendance to cover cost of their lunch and 3rd class rail-fare to and from their homes.

“Agriculturists over twenty-two years of age and in possession of a primary school certificate or its equivalent who wish to take the course should enrol before the 20th October. . . .”

The institution of such courses reveals the high state of development which has now been reached by the agricultural co-operative movement in the most progressive departments. It must not be assumed, however, that such development is as yet in any way general.

Similarly with regard to propaganda in favour of co-operation. In the Yonne the agricultural syndicate has its own weekly paper, *Le Paysan de l'Yonne*, which has a circulation amongst its members of over 7,000 copies.

But such periodicals are not to be found everywhere, though another worthy of notice is *L'Action Rurale*, a fortnightly six-page sheet published by the *Union du Sud-Est* and circulated to 30,000 members of its affiliated societies.

There can be no doubt that in certain villages genuine co-operative organisation, covering a wide sector of peasant activity, has taken a strong hold of the inhabitants. Such is the case not only in the large villages. In the tiny commune of Dierre which has a population of only 500 souls, twenty out of sixty cultivators belong to the co-operative wine-press started three years ago in the neighbouring commune of La Croix. A still larger number send their milk to the co-operative creamery at Bléré on the opposite bank of the Cher which dates from 1926, and most belong to the co-operative grain warehouse at La Croix. The local agricultural credit bank at Bléré has many members amongst the Dierre farmers, almost all of whom work their land themselves without employing hired labour, and the various forms of mutual insurance are well established amongst them.

Dierre is typical of the manorial demesnes which were broken up during the French Revolution and divided up amongst the land-hungry peasants. Its ruined château serves to-day to provide out-buildings for farms. Even the name of the former owners has been forgotten.

But co-operation has been able to take root also in villages where largish properties co-exist by the side of small ones. Such is the case at Manduel<sup>1</sup> which lies a few miles out of Nîmes on the road to Tarascon in the country immortalised by Daudet and Mistral. The Commune of Manduel has a total area of 2,666 hectares, of which all

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Milhaud, *Le Co-opération dans une Commune viticole*, Paris, 1931.

but a tenth are divided between vineyards and arable land in almost equal proportion.

Out of a population of 1476 in 1931, 427 were engaged in some branch of agriculture as against 125 in all other occupations. The commune can thus be classed as overwhelmingly agricultural. Taking into account the high proportion of vineyard, any holding of more than a hectare (approx.  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acres) can be reckoned as of some importance. Actually there are 259 holdings between one and five hectares in extent, but there are also four, each of which is over 50 hectares, and the four combined, cover 653 hectares, a quarter of the whole commune. In Manduel 250 persons returned themselves as agricultural labourers, but many of these must have a little land of their own. What is particularly interesting in this village is not only the fact that almost every normal type of agricultural co-operative institution, including a wine-making plant, a bakery, and a general store has been functioning successfully over a number of years, but co-operative "labour brigades" in which small proprietors and landless work side by side for a large part of the year, have also become an established institution.<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be said with the same degree of accuracy that the regional and departmental agricultural associations are completely controlled by the working peasants themselves as is the case with the communal institutions. The administration of a departmental co-operative is infinitely more complicated, and the small peasant, or even the more prosperous type of farmer who is able to afford the help of hired labour, can hardly be expected under present conditions to find the time for acquiring the necessary familiarity with business practice, let alone the time to attend frequent board meetings.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 197.



It is understandable, therefore, that the affairs of the departmental institutions tend to get into the hands of people with more leisure at their disposal. A glance at the composition of the board of directors of the *Crédit Agricole* at Auxerre is enough to show that the ordinary cultivator is rather conspicuous by his absence. The chairman is the paid secretary of the local agricultural society. Its chairman and treasurer are also on the board. Other directors are officials of various departmental associations, and two hold official appointments under the Ministry of Agriculture. The controlling committee is composed of local lawyers. Indeed only one member of the board is described as a farmer. It is noticeable that on the board of this key institution there is no representation of the various societies in the villages.

It need not, however, be assumed that cultivators have little say in shaping the policy of these higher bodies. After all, the French departments are as a rule of only moderate size, and it is quite possible for a working-farmer to make it his business to call at the departmental offices on a market-day if he has any problem he wishes to raise. The constitution of most of these associations, moreover, provides for the holding of annual general meetings at which grievances can be aired, and it must be borne in mind that in co-operative undertakings no member can have more than one vote: consequently the state of affairs which obtains in the management of private companies (where the board can, in all but the most exceptional cases, rely on a solid block of votes furnished by the larger shareholders) can never come about.

It is noteworthy that in the Yonne, the majority of co-operators fall within the category of middle peasantry. Thus the 400 members of the co-operative flour-mill, I

was informed by M. Rouget its manager, farm between 50 and 500 acres apiece. It is probable that only about a half of this number work their land without the aid of hired labour.

Nevertheless, when due account is taken of the obvious fact that the key positions in the centralised institutions at departmental headquarters are seldom occupied by working-farmers, and that many of the schemes have been developed in a way that has not permitted some of the poorest to join in, the achievements in the way of co-operative organisation must yet seem quite remarkable to English and Scottish observers, who are aware how little has been accomplished in their own country. The list of co-operative enterprises in the Var<sup>1</sup> (not including the credit banks and associations for mutual insurance) especially when it is remembered that more than half of them have been established in the last few years, cannot be regarded otherwise than as imposing. There were in the Var in 1935:

93 wine-making co-operatives grouping 16,000 wine-growers and producing from 900,000 to 1,200,000 hectolitres;

31 olive-oil co-operatives;

2 distilleries working with the wine-making co-operatives and also on behalf of isolated growers, which treat several thousand tons of pulp;

2 distilleries extracting essences for perfume;

2 co-operatives for threshing;

1 co-operative for the marketing of vegetables.

On the national scale the great mass of peasant organisations are grouped in three powerful constellations, each of which has its own social and political orientation.

<sup>1</sup> The area of the Var Department is 23,256 square miles.

The oldest of these is the *Union Nationale des Syndicats des Agriculteurs de France*, founded in 1886, only two years after the passing of the Waldeck-Rousseau law.

It had been preceded by the *Société des Agriculteurs de France* formed in 1868, the main aim of which was to harmonise the interests of the small and large farmers. Thus from the start the *Union Nationale* has had a very distinctive social atmosphere. Its leaders have been drawn from the landowning class in the main, and certainly not from either the middle or small farmers.

It is now presided over by the Marquis de Vogüé, and the secretary is the Comte de Blois. At its headquarters in the Rue d'Athènes at Paris are grouped some 10,000 local syndicates, most of which are concerned, as has already been made clear, with the purchase and distribution to their members of fertilisers, implements, etc. These syndicates are to be found in every corner of France; in Brittany and the north as well as in the south and round Paris. The Union has also been instrumental in creating co-operative organisation for purchasing member's requirements and marketing their produce. The turnover of this group of co-operatives in round figures is stated to be in the neighbourhood of 500 million francs. It has its own system of mutual credit banks, and of mutual insurance societies. In all, its activities embrace about a million peasant households.

Next oldest of these main national organisations is the *Fédération Nationale de la Mutualité et de la Co-opération Agricoles*. This owes its creation to the initiative of M. Albert Viger, who was at one time Minister of Agriculture. The organisation is closely connected with the semi-official *Crédit Agricole*. Its present chairman is Senator Henri Queuille who, also, has been Minister of Agriculture on several occasions. In general its members are working-

farmers. The organisation at its headquarters, which are at 129, Boulevard St. Germain, in Paris, is divided into four sections:

1. Mutual credit banks.
2. Agricultural syndicates and similar bodies.
3. Purchasing, processing, and marketing co-operatives.
4. Mutual insurance societies.

According to figures kindly supplied me by the General Secretary, M. Vimeux, the 6,577 local credit banks had nearly 600,000 members in 1934. The total number of syndicates affiliated was 1,257, of co-operatives 2,101 and of mutual insurance societies 20,576.

*The Confédération Nationale des Associations Agricoles* dates only from 1919. With headquarters in the Rue d'Amsterdam at Paris, it groups some sixty-five national or regional bodies including most of the specialist organisations, such as the national association of potato-growers, wheat-producers, poultry-farmers, etc. etc. It is in close relation with the Chambers of Agriculture, its secretary M. Prault, being at the same time director of the official *Assemblée Permanente des Présidents de Chambres d'Agriculture*. In point of the number of its members it is probable that the Confederation embraces more than the others. It is estimated that altogether about two million cultivators belong to organisations which are affiliated to it.

It may be asked at this stage what relations exist between the agricultural marketing agencies of a collective character and the consumers' side of the co-operative movement.

The question of establishing direct relations between producer and consumer has been engaging the attention of the international co-operative organisations and of the International Labour Office for some time. As long ago

as 1894 hopes were entertained in France that the "hands out-stretched" from the two branches of the movement would be speedily joined in a close grip. These hopes have been doomed to disappointment: "Since unity was proclaimed in 1894," writes Professor Gide thirty years later "we have made no progress. The two hands grope blindly in the dark, and have still not found each other."

The truth is that the basis of agreement in these matters is extremely hard to find, although the advantages which would accrue from its realisation to both parties are too obvious to need underlining. For if the consumers' societies are interested in obtaining goods at the lowest possible price consistent with quality, the marketing co-operatives are interested no less in obtaining the best possible price for the agricultural produce they are handling on behalf of their members. The question of the extent of business which can be developed between the two sides of the movement, therefore, inevitably tends to be left to the hazards of the market. It is probable that the volume of such business is already substantial, but it is not yet transacted as the result of a definite application of policy. It is most considerable in cases such as the egg-and-poultry co-operative mentioned on page 214 where the local consumers' society includes many agriculturists, who are able to influence its policy, and to induce it to make its purchases from their own marketing organisation. A further difficulty as regards France is the fact that so many of the co-operative organisations in agriculture are subject to influences which have little in common with the consumers' movement which is largely a working-class movement.

The development which has occurred in this country in the direction of the wholesale co-operative societies directly engaging in various branches of agricultural production has no counterpart in France.

I have purposely made the foregoing survey of the various types of association for economic ends as complete as possible in order that the reader may be in a position to form his own judgment as to their value in helping to solve the problems with which the French peasantry is confronted. What has been the general effect on the farmers' position of all this effort, which has now extended over some three generations? What possibilities of further development along such lines may be discerned?

In order to be able to produce at all, the agriculturist must have, in addition to his labour, land, capital, and raw materials. Having all these he must (if he is to be integrated into the scheme of twentieth-century life, which has developed a demand for innumerable articles of consumption impossible to produce in the villages) find a market for his produce, that in turn he may provide himself with those products of urban industry for which he now craves.

If he is a tenant he must have means of defending himself against the landlord. If he is a labourer he must likewise solve to his satisfaction the problems arising out of his relationship to his employer.

As a dweller in the countryside, whether in a village or scattered in lone dwellings, miles distant from neighbours, he and his family are interested in such questions as housing, education, health and the opportunity for recreation and culture.

To take the question of access to the land first, it has already been pointed out that the *Crédit Agricole* has enabled about one hundred thousand persons to set up as farmers. This is quite a respectable number, though it looks small in comparison with a total landless peasantry of two or three millions. That, however, is but one side of

the question. It can scarcely be doubted that but for the existence of the mutual credit banks, hundreds of thousands of small and even middle farmers would have been expropriated in the last few decades during which the prices of agricultural products have fluctuated violently. During the present crisis the situation of many has been so desperate that they have been unable to discharge their obligations to the bank. It is to be observed, however, that concessions have been made to debtors, and instances of foreclosure by the mutual credit banks have been comparatively rare.

The French farming community has also benefited somewhat to the extent that association has been a means of reclaiming land, or more often of keeping it under cultivation in face of unfavourable factors which could not have been coped with single-handed. In the main, however, it is true to say that economic co-operation has made no more than a beginning at solving the difficulty that besets so many peasant families owing to having insufficient land to enable them to secure a decent living.

Next point; the question of capital. Here it is clear that co-operation has proved its value. Since 1920 the *Crédit Agricole* has lent some 15 milliards,<sup>1</sup> of which about a half is represented by investments of a more or less permanent nature in farming-capital. A good deal has gone into the expensive plant necessary in modern methods of processing, a larger amount has been laid out in the purchase by individual farmers of agricultural implements, and of stock, and in the erection of buildings and the construction of field-works. Even in times of the greatest depression the process has not altogether been arrested, and it would seem permissible to assume that if prices can be kept reasonably stable a substantial further

<sup>1</sup> About £105,000,000.

increase of capital investment can be achieved by economic co-operation. It should not be forgotten, however, that the funds of the *Crédit Agricole* are derived largely from the State budget, though that does not alter the fact that they have been made available to the farmer solely because of his readiness to strengthen his credit-worthiness by associating with his fellows.

In relation to the problem of acquiring the raw materials he needs, the cultivator has been helped by association in two ways. He has found in the mutual credit system the means of financing his purchases during the period before the harvest when he may be short of ready cash. He has also found association useful in controlling the quality as well as the price of the goods he buys. But association has not been one-sided. While the farmers have been slowly and painfully learning to combine in order to meet the purveyors of agricultural requirements on more level terms, the development of monopolistic tendencies in industry has gone on apace. In most trades there are to-day price-rings, cartels, and selling-agreements, which on the whole outweigh the advantages which the cultivators have gained through the formation of supply syndicates and co-operatives. It has been calculated, for instance, that whereas the prices of agricultural produce had increased between 1914 and 1934 by 250 per cent, the price of nitrate fertiliser had augmented by 400 per cent or more.

Far more co-ordination of effort on the part of the various farmers' organisations will be necessary in the future, if the cultivator is to be really safeguarded in this direction.

The services already rendered to the farmer by co-operation in the sphere of marketing are considerable. But they are very uneven, not only as between one branch



of agricultural production and other, but also in different parts of the country.

The wine-growers have perhaps reaped the most benefit up to the present time, and their example has been followed in other branches of production carried on in the wine districts. But in the immensely important area round Paris co-operative marketing had not until recently played a very conspicuous rôle.

The trade in meat is still almost entirely done through private channels, the individual farmer selling direct to commercial interests.

Nineteen thirty-six, however, has marked a big step forward in regard to the marketing of wheat. A great increase of co-operative marketing in this branch of production seems almost certain, though naturally it will be in the teeth of opposition from the private trader. Here again the existing dispersal of effort will have to be overcome if the farmers' organisations are to prove really effective in dealing with the highly organised industrial and distributive combines which take the larger part of produce sold off the farm.

Clearly the question of finding a market for agricultural produce is not limited to countering the effects of monopoly in industry and distribution. In the last resort satisfactory prices for farm products depend on the level of purchasing-power amongst the mass of the population. That, however, is a factor over which the agriculturist can have little or no control through the exercise of his purely economic powers.

The progress of trade-union organisation as a means whereby the millions of agricultural labourers can influence their wage-rates and conditions of work has already been discussed. Developments of any consequence have been so very recent that it would be premature to assess the probable repercussions on the condition of the great

mass of landless peasants in the near future. As regards the somewhat parallel problem of tenants' protection against their landlords, experience would appear to suggest that this will be one of the last fields in which co-operative action will play an important part. The tendency would appear to be to seek for a solution of problems of this nature through political action rather than economic association.

Almost nothing has been accomplished by co-operative effort in spheres which lie outside the actual processes of production. Consumers' co-operatives for the supply of the ordinary requirements of the household are not easy to establish in the countryside, where the turnover is too low to permit of their being run with economy. Nor has co-operative effort achieved anything in the way of contributing to making rural life more attractive by the provision of sports grounds and places of amusement, libraries, or even clinics and nurseries. The reason is not far to seek. The general situation of the peasantry has sunk so low, the struggle for mere existence has been so great, that it has been unthinkable that any large part of their income should be made available for purposes of social betterment.

The great advance made along the lines of economic association has therefore brought many tangible benefits to the peasants. It would have brought more but for the existence, between the various groups, of sharp lines of cleavage which are not, in their essence, based on conflicts of economic interest between the peasants themselves. The growing movement that can be discerned in favour of liquidating these divisions is one which falls more properly to be dealt with in the next chapter.

In conclusion of the present one it may be hazarded that the future will judge the importance of the economic

movement amongst the peasantry to lie not so much in the immediate achievements as in the creation of cadres numbering hundreds of thousands amongst the small and middle peasantry, who have learned through their economic experiments the sovereign virtues of organisation and technical efficiency. It is the existence of this village *élite* which makes it possible to conceive to-day of political action by the peasantry on a scale and in a sense that were undreamed of only three generations ago.

## CHAPTER VI

### TOWARDS A SOLUTION

(Continued)

(ii) *The Peasantry in Politics.*

THE DEVELOPMENT OF machine industry, what is commonly known as the 'industrial revolution', has been effected in every part of the world where it has come about on the basis of an abundant supply of cheap labour being available for the factories.

Normally the requisite supply of cheap labour has been secured by drawing on the countryside. Working conditions on the farm and in the villages becoming progressively more unattractive, the country labourer is induced to forsake his former occupation to seek employment in the mill and the mine. But at the same time he must be able to obtain food for himself and his family at the cheapest possible price in his new environment; were it otherwise his employer would be faced with rising costs of production which would seriously hamper his enterprise.

When the class of industrial employers has conquered political power, the solution is usually found by using control of the State to depress conditions in the agricultural industry in a variety of ways, of which the classic example is the opening of the home agricultural market to foreign competition from countries where a surplus of agricultural produce is available for export.

In Britain the repeal of the Corn-laws by Sir Robert Peel's Government in 1846 speeded up the recruitment of

labour from the country districts for the new industries and at the same time provided the industrial population with cheap food.

A similar policy was introduced in France in the reign of Napoleon III, whose accession to the throne marked the triumph of the manufacturing interest in the struggle for State power. In the *Moniteur* of January 1st, 1860, the Emperor frankly proclaims the object of his new industrial policy:

“In order to encourage industrial production, the raw materials indispensable to industry must be relieved of all taxes. The Treasury will temporarily sustain a loss through the lowering of taxation on articles of current consumption, but our budget provides the means for its liquidation.”

So began the period during which the claims of agriculture were completely subordinated to the requirements of a growing industry. The rural population diminished not only in proportion to the whole, but absolutely. In 1846, 75·6 per cent out of a total population of 35,401,761 lived in communes having less than 2,000 inhabitants. Sixty years later France's population was somewhat greater, there were by then nearly 40 million people living in the whole country. But only 57·9 per cent still lived in communes with less than 2,000 inhabitants. In the earlier year 26,650,446 persons were living in these mainly rural areas. In 1904 the corresponding figure was only 22,715,011, an absolute decrease of nearly four million.

The expansionist policy of the Second Empire came to an inglorious end with the defeat of Sedan and the surrender of Louis Napoleon to the Prussians. On the 4th September, 1870, on the morrow of Sedan, the Republic

was proclaimed. Elections took place the following February which resulted in an overwhelming victory for the conservative elements. For the moment the Bonapartists were completely out of the picture, but whereas the Radicals, representing the urban middle-class, and the Paris workers were for continuing the war, the vast majority of the peasantry were not interested in doing so and only demanded peace, and peace at almost any price. Thiers, who had been minister in the reign of Louis-Philippe, and who represented the forces of conservatism, if no longer those of the monarchy, was elected in twenty-six departments as the man who stood for the speedy conclusion of peace.

For a time despite the attitude of the newly-elected Assembly the war was continued by Gambetta and the other die-hard Radicals. Further, as a consequence both of the military defeat of the *régime* and their own sufferings, the people of Paris rose under working-class leadership. On March 18th revolution broke out anew and the Commune was set up.

In the course of their struggle against the Provisional Government of Thiers the workers of Paris endeavoured to win over the poorer peasants to their support. One of the appeals addressed by the Commune to the peasants at that time is given in Appendix B. But there were then no organisational links between the industrial working-class and the peasants. To the latter Paris was represented by the landowners and clergy as desiring above all to continue the war, which would mean utter ruin to the countryside, and its devastation by the Prussians. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that the appeal of the Commune fell on deaf ears. Its bloody suppression by the Government of Thiers left the field clear for the setting-up of a new constitution which, although Republican in outward form, approximated in many respects to the monarchical model.

In its original form the constitution actually left the door open for a restoration of the monarchy, though this in fact never came about, and in 1884 an amendment was passed making it illegal in future to call the Republican *régime* in question. Nevertheless in addition to the President, to whom extensive powers were reserved, there was set up a Senate which at first included seventy-five life members. The remaining members were elected by the councils of the communes. The life members have since been dispensed with, and all senators are now elected by the *conseils municipaux*. It is to be noted that the whole of Paris has only thirty votes whereas every rural commune, even the smallest, has one vote. Consequently the Senate represents to a peculiar degree the country population as opposed to the industrial workers in the towns. The overwhelming proportion of the electors for the Senate are countrymen and mostly agriculturists at that.

But besides being representative mainly of rural France, the Senate inevitably reflects the dominant political currents, not of the present, but of the past. In the first place senators retain their mandate for nine years, and only a third of the Senate is renewed at a time at intervals of three years. Consequently, even immediately after fresh senatorial elections have taken place, a two-thirds majority still represents the opinion of from three to six years earlier. And that is not all. Those who then elected them may already have been in office in their communes for some years. Clearly, therefore, although it is quite true that in the last resort the mandate of the Senate derives mainly from the peasantry, it is far from being the case that that body need actually represent what is the dominant feeling in the country districts during its term of office. In reality it represents the peasant outlook of half a generation earlier. *The point is well worth bearing in mind.*

Thus the eclipse of the Napoleonic fortunes and the establishment of the Third Republic in 1871 in no wise changed the position. Political power in France still remained in the same hands. Thiers, one of the founders of the Republic, had held office under earlier *régimes* and though he detested dictatorships and the policy of military adventures with which they are associated he was entirely in favour of the subordination of economy to the manufacturing interest.

The Third Republic only carried a stage further the policy inaugurated in the time of Napoleon, and the progressive ruination of the small and middle peasantry continued.

At the same time the progress of industry, the concentration of capital in fewer hands, was having a considerable effect on the fortunes of the smaller manufacturers and the traders in the towns. A reflection of the degree to which the interests of the "small" man were being sacrificed is seen in the anomalies of the French fiscal system, which presses far more heavily on the small business man than on the big companies and the wealthiest categories of citizens.

This process of differentiation between small-scale and large-scale industry led to the growth of new Left-wing parties and groups with programmes which appealed more especially to the lower middle-class.

In particular measures were introduced aiming at undercutting the power of the Church. Such was Jules Ferry's law of 1879 which secularised the educational system and led to the closing down of the Jesuit seminaries.

The new parties sought for support also in the countryside, coming forward with proposals designed to attract the still large class of independent peasant producers. This class, as was shown in the previous chapter, was beginning to build up its strength anew to meet the altered



conditions in the economic sphere. The Radical parties were not unsuccessful in their appeals, and gradually acquired considerable influence in the country districts—in some parts of the country more than in others. The north-west in particular remained staunchly conservative and therefore continued to be under the influence of the industrial and banking interests with whom the big conservative landowners had made their peace.

As a consequence of the growing political influence of the Radicals a certain amount of legislative effort bore fruit which was of assistance to the bulk of the peasantry, favouring in particular the attempts at organisation by the cultivators in defence of their economic interests.

The most important of these legislative achievements have already been mentioned in Chapter V. The basis of them all was the Waldeck-Rousseau law of 1884, which gave legal sanction to the formation of professional bodies (syndicates) in the agricultural industry. The establishment of the *Crédit Agricole* in the eighteen-nineties was another outstanding gain for the small and middle peasants; so was the 'Loi Viger' which came into force in 1900 and formed the basis for the remarkable development of mutual insurance institutions amongst the agricultural population. The revival of Radicalism after the War was marked by further legislation designed to assist the peasantry, notably the law of August 5th, 1920, which established agricultural co-operatives on a firm foundation.

Yet it must not be supposed that the deterioration of the situation in the countryside was rapid. After all, the years between the Treaty of Francfort which ended the Franco-Prussian war and the end of the nineteenth century were a period in which industrial production in France increased rapidly. One of the bases of this expansion was the revolution in agricultural technique itself, and in the mean

of transport, which tended continually to open up new markets for French agriculture and at the same time provided an outlet for the superfluous rural population. If it was true that the least fortunate strata of the peasantry were faring badly, the same was by no means true of a section of the middle peasantry, and certainly not of the large-scale farmers. These latter sections were still able to make handsome profits and became more and more interested, through investment of their savings, in the new financial enterprises and foreign loans which were continuously being launched at the time. For a long period successive Chambers of Deputies continued to reflect the demands of these more fortunate strata rather than the dispossessed peasantry or the working-class. The latter indeed was still suffering from the after-effects of the reign of terror with which the Commune had been suppressed.

Typical of the kind of governments which were the rule in those days was that of Freycinet. Writing of this period Jacques Bainville, the historian of the Third Republic, observes ironically:

“Floquet<sup>1</sup> notes with bitterness that hardly have the republicans arrived in office than they begin to be afraid of themselves and seek to conciliate the very forces (ie. of the Right) with which they were yesterday in combat. Floquet failed to realise that the safety of the *régime* required there should be no gliding down the slope towards pure democracy, socialism and revolution. But that was precisely the fixed idea in the mind of the new President. After his election he drafted a message of which even Macmahon’s ministers would not have disapproved. Jules Grèvy once again promised a policy ‘liberal yet thoroughly conservative’. He was a conservative after his own fashion but conservative he was.

<sup>1</sup> A prominent Radical politician.—N. H.

The Dufaure ministry was merely re-modelled. A well-known Protestant, Waddington, became its head. He was succeeded by Freycinet, another. All these men were wealthy. They constituted a kind of aristocracy. The Sixteenth Arrondissement was their Faubourg St. Germain. With them matters were arranged as at a board meeting."

One is reminded of the "organised quarrel" between Liberal and Tory which characterised British politics during the same period.

The strength of the Republican Party reposed largely in its alliance with Freemasonry.

"For their battle," writes Jacques Bainville, "the Republican Party needed cadres. It possessed them. There was the Freemasonry. There was also the Protestant world. The Republic, like any other *régime*, had to have its armature, a directing-centre for its thought and will; otherwise there would be dissipation of its power. One is led sometimes to exaggerate, sometimes to deny, the role of the Freemasons. The truth probably lies between the two. The secret societies are not all-powerful. That would be to over-simplify. Yet in the development of republican policy there is a certain continuity, there are also programmes and slogans which could not be explained were everything left to the hazard of popular sentiment."

As the French industrialists and bankers began to recover from the defeat of France by the Prussians a fresh tendency towards territorial expansion, hesitant at first, but later becoming stronger, began to manifest itself. French imperialism, abandoning for the moment all idea of regaining the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine began to turn its attention further afield. Tunis was occupied, a French expedition was sent to Tonkin, and a war with China ensued in which the French forces sustained

a notable disaster at Lang-Son. Jules Ferry, the minister responsible, became the most unpopular man in France, and in the elections of 1885 which immediately succeeded his downfall, the parties of the Right, posing as the apostles of peace, succeeded in obtaining fifty more seats than the Republicans on the first vote. Such, still at that period, was the detestation in which military adventures were held by the peasantry.

In the event a Republican majority was obtained at the second vote by an alliance between the Republican Party and the Radicals, but there had for a moment seemed a possibility that the old semi-feudal elements might be victorious, and by re-establishing the monarchy put a brake on the policy of industrialisation.

The discontent of the lower middle-class was reflected also in the meteor-like political career of General Boulanger, who, for a year or two flashed across the stage of public life. His career suggests that he was a forerunner of the Fascist dictators of later days. Posing first as a Radical, working round gradually towards the most extreme nationalism and in the end negotiating secretly with the Catholic Right, Boulanger won an enormous following from amongst the urban population, particularly of Paris. Had he himself possessed greater determination it is not impossible that he would have succeeded in establishing a dictatorial *régime* which would have arrested for a considerable time the process of democratic development.

As it happened, however, Boulanger vacillated at critical moments, and was eventually got rid of with comparative ease by his opponents. The net effect of his movement was probably to hasten the political education of the French masses.

At all events the closing years of the nineteenth century were marked by a rapid advance of Radicalism, which,

too, had roots in the Masonic Lodges. But unlike the Republicans the Radicals had definite organisational connections in the countryside, though these were formed at a comparatively late stage. In time they proved a satisfactory off-set to the influence which the Right-wing Republicans were able to exercise through the Prefects and the administrative apparatus generally. As has already been observed the Radicals to some extent found a place for the demands of the middle and small peasantry in their programmes. Amongst other legislation affecting the peasantry were the protective measures introduced by Jules Méline with a view to saving the wheat-growers from the effects of overseas competition. The period of Radical supremacy was further marked by the development of the quarrel with the Papacy, and the ending of the Concordat which had been in force since the time of Napoleon I. Doubtless the triumph of anti-clericalism opened the way to the development of an independent political movement amongst the small and middle peasants, but it cannot be said that its immediate effect was altogether good. The gulf separating Catholic and Freethinker for a time became wider than ever. Any effect it might have had was moreover greatly discounted by the shortcomings of the Radical leaders. The influence of the Radical Party amongst the thrifty peasantry was damaged by the implication of its best-known politicians such as Clemenceau in the monstrous Panama scandal, which laid bare the corruption prevailing in the political circles of the Left no less than of the Republican Right. When it became known that more than half the 1,400 millions of francs which had been subscribed in the ill-fated enterprise had been put to no better purpose than bribing members of the Government and of Parliament, the indignation of eight hundred and fifty thousand defrauded shareholders

knew no bounds. The revelations were undoubtedly a powerful factor in retarding the growth of Radical tendencies in the country, as in the towns.

If the corruption which had been laid bare amongst the Radical politicians lost the party support in the country districts and helped the clericals to preserve at least some of their influence over the rural population, it had, on the whole, a contrary effect in the towns, where it contributed not a little to the rapid advance in the Socialist vote. The First International, founded by Karl Marx in 1864, virtually came to an end with the suppression of the Paris Commune. The Second Socialist International was founded in 1889. Its French section began to achieve considerable strength in the big cities, benefiting from the outstanding oratorical ability of such men as Jean Jaurès and Jules Guesde.

However, the renascent Socialism of the 'nineties seemed a very different affair from its forerunner. It tended to merge imperceptibly with what remained of the Radicals after the Panama scandal, with that Radical-Socialism of Léon Bourgeois of which Jacques Bainville writes that

“no one invented it. It was in the air. A cautious type of Socialism which carried no threat to property, a practical kind of Socialism which was to diffuse prosperity through the medium of subsidies, jobs, allowances and pensions. It was a kind of Socialism which did yeoman service at election-time. By means of it the Radical Party discovered again a basis for its existence, a new road to follow. There prevails a widespread popular belief in the existence, in the hands of a few wealthy people, of vast treasures, to appropriate only a small part of which would be the means of making everyone happy. From this belief sprung the theory of an income-tax, as a means of bringing about fiscal justice, and obtaining contributions from the

wealthy in order to lighten the burden on the very poor."

Actually Paul Doumer,<sup>1</sup> the finance minister in the Léon Bourgeois Government, did introduce an income-tax. The measure was promptly rejected by the Senate, just as Lloyd George's budget of 1911 was rejected by the House of Lords, but in the former case with less talk of a constitutional crisis, for the Cabinet merely resigned. Since in France the resignation of the Government is not followed by a dissolution that was the end for the time being of the income-tax.

Characteristic of the new Socialism was not only its tendency to compromise with Radicalism; it differed also from the Communards in its systematic neglect, which amounted virtually to contempt, of the interests of the peasantry. The Socialist Party had no organisational link with the country population, and outside the ranks of the transport workers, public employees, etc., who were to be found in small numbers in the villages, its influence was confined to the towns.

Radicalism had been largely discredited in the eyes of its supporters by the revelation of the financial corruption of its chiefs. Socialism in its turn suffered from the frequency with which the most noted tribunes deserted the standard, and went over to the enemy. Millerand, Aristide Briand, and Pierre Laval all commenced their political careers in the Socialist Party. Briand it was who, when in office, broke the strike on the railways in 1910 by mobilising the personnel and thus rendering them subject to military law, an illegality which he defended on the plea of defence of the State.

<sup>1</sup> *Assassinated during his term of office as President of the Republic by the White Russian Gorguloff in May, 1932.*

Whatever sympathy the Socialist Party may have attracted amongst the peasantry in the early years of the present century (and it was certainly not great) could hardly survive the advent of war in 1914. The Socialist Party, constituting a section of the Second International, had opposed to the military preparations of succeeding Governments the promise that the international solidarity of the working-class (including the German working-class), all organised in the same international, would prevent the threatening catastrophe. In the event, as is known, with few exceptions, the Socialist parties of the various countries, when the test eventually came, failed to act together, failed to call a general strike, and in a very short time were drawn into the struggle on the side of their respective governments. Jean Jaurès, the one Socialist leader in France who might have taken a different line, was assassinated in Paris on the day war was declared.

The four years of war brought terrible suffering for the peasantry of France; suffering stoically borne. For the most part accepting the War as an inescapable fatality they went through with it to the end, whether it was their lot to man the trenches, or, as was the case with those too young or too old to be sent to the front, and the women, to remain behind and strive as best they could to keep the farms going with resources that were woefully insufficient.

In 1917 a point was reached when the people of France were thoroughly exhausted under the strain of the War, mutinies were frequent in the army and were severely dealt with. Collapse on the Western Front was only just averted.

When peace and victory came at length, the detestation of war which has always characterised the French peasantry



was immeasurably strengthened. Unlike the more politically advanced amongst the workers, however, the peasantry did not place any of the blame on the shoulders of those who had been responsible for the direction of French policy in the pre-war years. Consequently, as in Britain, the first elections after the War resulted in a sweeping success for the politicians who had led the nation to victory. A great "national" majority was returned to the Chamber of Deputies by the elections which took place a year after the Armistice.

That did not mean, however, that the peasants, so many of whom were just back from the War, and among them tens of thousands disabled, were in a mood to acquiesce in any whittling down of what they considered were their rights. In fact the immediate post-war years were a period in which there was considerable ferment amongst the peasantry, though it was seldom well organised. The movement among the *métayers* of the south-west, which gained important victories, is a case in point. In any case the feeling was sufficiently strong to urge upon the governments of the time the wisdom of taking steps to defend peasant interests. It was during this period that much of the legislation to assist the agricultural co-operative movement was passed. At the same time home agriculture came to be protected by a systematic application of tariffs on imported produce.

For a time, thanks to inflation and the systematic and all-round under-consumption of the war years, a period of high prices intervened in which the peasantry sustained the illusion of some sort of prosperity. The dominant feeling still was that Germany was entirely to blame for the War and must be made to pay the cost. Poincaré, as late as 1923, was able to occupy the Ruhr in order to

wind the screw

But by then a period of economic depression had set in, the inflated post-war prices collapsed, and the peasantry once again moved towards the Left. In the elections of 1924 the Radicals and Socialists had a big majority. Briand, who had quarrelled with his colleagues in the National Union, and who now came out as the apostle of peace, was the man of the hour.

A new Government quickly reversed the foreign policy of Poincaré and evacuated the Ruhr. Ambitious programmes of social reform were in the air. The way things were going gave no satisfaction to the propertied classes, however, and a 'flight from the franc' occurred in July, 1926, at which time the value of the franc fell to only a tenth of its pre-war level. Before the threat of the financial interests, who refused further credit, the Government of M. Edouard Herriot bowed, and did as it was bid, inviting the ex-President Raymond Poincaré to assume the leadership of a ministry of National Union. A policy of severe deflation was inaugurated, and after the capitulation of the Radicals it is scarcely surprising that in the 1928 elections they and the Socialists fared badly.

Nevertheless, well in advance of the time the World Crisis reached France a new spirit of struggle was already discernible here and there amongst the small and middle peasantry. Despite the deflationary policy of the Poincaré Government the movement for economic organisation gained impetus. It was about this time also that the working-class parties began seriously to develop a footing amongst the peasantry. The Communist Party was the first to do so, organising in 1929 the *Confédération Générale des Paysans Travailleurs*. The basis of this organisation was the working-farmer whether a small proprietor, a cash, or share, tenant. No others were eligible for membership. In structure the new organisation aimed, like the larger

peasant organisations already in existence, at creating an edifice in three stages: at the base syndicates in the communes, these grouped in departmental unions, and the whole united in the central organisation with its office in Paris. The Confederation has published regularly its own weekly paper, *La Voix Paysanne*, with a circulation running into several thousand. In its early days the C.G.P.T. won considerable esteem amongst the peasantry of certain districts, as for instance of the Alpes Maritimes, where it championed the grievances of the perfume-growers whose was one of the first branches of agriculture to be involved in the crisis. The tobacco-growers of the south-west were another category amongst which the C.G.P.T. rapidly gained influence. On the other hand there are large parts of France, notably the region round Paris, the north, and east, regions where small-scale production is overshadowed by large, where the organisation has failed to establish itself.

Two years after the founding of the C.G.P.T., the Socialist Party likewise set up its peasant organisation under the title of the *Confédération Nationale Paysanne*. A good deal of rivalry has persisted between these organisations, and the C.N.P. has up to the present steadily declined the proposals which are constantly being made from the other body to merge the two into a single united organisation.

The parliamentary elections which took place in 1932 confirmed that opinion in France, which had rallied a few years earlier to the idea of the *Union Nationale* and in defence of the franc, was now again moving in a Leftward direction. The rapid fall in the value of agricultural produce throughout the world was beginning to create serious difficulties for the French peasantry. The *C.G.P.T.* and the *C.N.P.* were not the only political associations newly-formed making a special appeal to the

agricultural community. Another, the *Parti Agraire et Paysan Français* had been founded by M. Fleurant Agricola in the autumn of 1927 at a meeting of peasants held at Aurillac in Auvergne. The main pretension of the new party was to put forward a programme which would not be, as the programmes of existing parties, whether of the Right or of the Left, had always been, one in which the claims of agriculture were relegated to the second place. It was to be a party whose members were to be peasants themselves, or at least already associated with the pursuit of agriculture. It aimed at the creation of its own representation in Parliament and published the periodical *La Voix de le Terre* in order to propagate its ideas. Although the progress of the new party was slow its organisational activity proceeded nevertheless, and by 1935 it could claim to have thirty-eight departmental federations affiliated.

The *Parti Agraire* was looked at askance by the older parties, particularly those of the Left, from which quarter the accusation was levelled that it was little more than a landowners' league in disguise. How far this accusation was well founded at the beginning of its career may be a matter of doubt; amongst the membership were certainly to be found many small and middle peasants; while certain agricultural specialists were its enthusiastic supporters. But in 1934 the Agrarian Party was prominent amongst the organisations which took the initiative in founding the *Front Paysan*, or Peasant Front. That was in September, a few weeks after the Communist and Socialist parties in France had signed their "United Front" agreement. The Peasant Front from the start had the support—in some cases the open support—of older organisations which had long been regarded as strongholds of conservatism. Its programme was as follows:

"The associations, leagues, groups set up as a temporary measure a vigilance committee and committee of peasant action which takes the name of *Front Paysan*.

"The *Front Paysan* has a two-fold aim:

1. To achieve unity between the organisations adhering to it in regard to the broad lines of general policy in defence of the peasantry;
2. To organise the mass demonstration which is essential for the defence of peasant interests, and to take up ultimately the public position which the situation shall impose.

"The objectives of the *Front Paysan* are the following:

1. Struggle against a policy of deflation which tends towards an unacceptable levelling of French and world prices.
2. Struggle in favour of a re-valorisation of internal prices paid to the producer.
3. Struggle for the protection of national labour in all its forms.
4. Defence of the Republican *régime*, with reform of the State, having as its basis the family and the profession.
5. Organisation of national economy on a vocational basis."

It is to be noted that loyalty to the Republican *régime* (under reservation) is proclaimed, and although point 5 of the programme definitely suggests sympathy with the conception of the corporate State, it is rather in the pronouncements of the leading spokesman of the Peasant Front, M. Henri Dorgères, than in the programme itself, that the distinctly Fascist character of the organisation becomes apparent.

In his book M. Dorgères frankly confesses his aim to be the conquest of State power by non-parliamentary and in fact illegal means:

"We are not counting greatly on 'successful elections' . . . we shall not shrink from illegality, and we are embarked on a plan of action which in that direction will be extremely effective.

"To-day we are still at the stage of preparation. We have held large demonstrations everywhere and raised troops which have yet to be enrolled. But when the peasant class is completely organised on a revolutionary footing such as ours, we shall look for allies in the towns who share our programme and accept the need for giving French agriculture the leading place in the Nation.

"It is when these alliances shall have been concluded that we shall apply the methods we have had in mind for some years. To take power legally, that is electorally, seems to us to be chimerical, but to take power by force would seem equally impossible so long as the rulers of this land retain the will to defend the *régime*. They have at their disposal so many police, so many machine-guns, that for my part I recoil in terror before the river of blood such an action would entail. But the illegal seizure of power seems to me possible if we can induce our rulers to abdicate."<sup>1</sup>

And in support of the possibility of a "bloodless revolution" the author goes on to make an obvious allusion to the resignation of the Daladier Government in February, 1934, doubtless in the hope that his readers had short memories!

As it happens, however, the activities of the *Dorgèristes* have already on frequent occasions led to disorders and fatalities. On paper the numerical strength of the *Front Paysan* is considerable. The active supporters are, however, far less numerous although at times, particularly in 1935 and up to the time of the last parliamentary elections, the Peasant Front held some big meetings. As might be expected it is strongest in the west, in Brittany, and round

<sup>1</sup> *Haut les Fourches!* by Henri Dorgères, pp. 177-8.

Blois with which Dorgères has close personal associations. There is a strong nucleus of shock troops recruited and organised on the familiar fascist model.

If, however, of late the fortunes of the Peasant Front have been somewhat on the wane, that is not to say that its propaganda has been without effect. What it has been impossible to achieve in a positive manner has been achieved negatively. In other words the promises for the future have served to some extent to divert a section of the peasantry from the job of tackling their more immediate problems. As Dorgères candidly admits:

“Our chief merit is to have found a means of inducing the peasants to forsake the pursuit of material aims in favour of attacking problems of a higher order.”

The passionate attachment of the French peasant to the cause of peace has already been emphasised. Events that were taking place on the international stage could not leave him altogether indifferent. The invasion of Manchuria by the Japanese in 1931 and the bombardment of Chapai in the following spring were followed in early summer by an event much nearer home. Against a background of anti-Soviet intrigue, M. Paul Doumer, President of the Republic, was assassinated by a White Russian in May. A feeling began to spread abroad that the cause of peace was again in danger. In the summer of that year the two famous French writers, the late Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland, sounded the alarm in an appeal for an international conference of all who sincerely desired peace. The response to the appeal was swift and impressive. Already at the Amsterdam Congress, which met in August, *a certain peasant representation was to be found amongst the important delegation that went from France.*

In the following winter a network of committees began to spread over the country and to awaken the masses of the people to the new dangers threatening. The accession to power of Hitler in Germany increased the general apprehension, which was not abated by the growing strength within the country itself of a number of leagues, Fascist in outlook, and still more clearly Fascist in their methods and organisation. Under the double threat from Hitler without, and the *Croix de Feu*, the *Jeunesses Patriotes*, the *Action Française* and the rest from within, the alarm of the progressive forces increased. Within a few months of the burning of the Reichstag an international conference against the danger of Fascism was being held in the Salle Pleyel in Paris. By the end of the year the committees founded after the Amsterdam Congress and those formed after Pleyel to resist the Fascist menace had been united into the National Committee against War and Fascism (popularly known as the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement).

Meanwhile another series of financial scandals served to bring discredit upon the Radical Government of the day. The Stavisky affair was grist to the mill of Colonel De la Roque and the other Fascist leaders, who were able to attract a considerable following, largely drawn from certain sections of the dissatisfied peasantry. The *Croix de Feu* gained particularly strong support in French North Africa, where thousands of French settlers were in a terrible plight as a result of the collapse in agricultural prices.

Emboldened by success the Fascist forces took the offensive and on February 9th, 1934, staged their assault on the Chamber of Deputies. That night was one of the most critical in the history of France, perhaps of the world. For hours the workers of Paris fought with the Fascists, who in the end were compelled to draw off their forces. Three days later the indignation of the workers



found its expression in a general one-day strike which was carried into every part of the country.

But if the action of the workers prevented a *coup d'etat* it did not save the Radical Government. The Daladier Cabinet resigned to make way for a new Government of National Union under the veteran reactionary Gaston Doumergue. For two years France lived under a succession of administrations which governed largely by decree, and pursued a drastic policy of deflation that greatly accentuated the agricultural crisis by virtue of the inroads made into the purchasing-power of the people. Despite their setback on February 9th the Fascist leagues, secure from interference from the Government, continued to organise their forces, and both in the towns and in the country districts frequently took the offensive and provoked conflicts in which lives were lost and hundred of persons were injured.

The masses in their turn responded by building up the movement for unity of the anti-Fascist forces. In the summer of 1934 the largest federation of the Socialist Party, that of the Seine-et-Oise, affiliated to the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement, out of which there grew also a powerful organisation of women. In August the national organisations of the Socialist and Communist parties signed a United Front agreement.

Already by the autumn of that year the idea of a Popular Front to embrace not only the working-class but the town middle-class and the peasantry was beginning to take shape. Speaking in the Chamber of Deputies on November 13th, Maurice Thorez on behalf of the Communists declared:

“The struggle of the masses can impose the lightening of charges which crush the producers, both wage-earners and independent; it can compel the capitalist State to come to the assistance of the unemployed, the poor

peasants, the small business people, the artisans. It can force it to respect the rights of the ex-servicemen. . . .

"To succeed, we must get together in the working-class quarters of the cities, in the villages, around committees democratically elected in popular assembly. To act efficiently and successfully there has got to be organised the broad people's front for work, for freedom, and for peace."

Throughout the following year the Popular Front which Thorez had outlined began to take a living form. Already the growing unity of the people was reflected in the results of the cantonal elections of October 1934. As yet, however, there was little sign that the peasantry were coming into the Popular Front in any great numbers. That became plain in the communal elections in May 1935. Hundreds of councils were returned with Socialist and Communist majorities, including many in rural areas. On the 14th of July 1935, prominent Radicals such as Daladier, Frot and Pierre Cot spoke on a common platform beside Henri Barbusse, leader of the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement and the representatives of Socialist and Communist parties.

The betrayal of Abyssinia and the League of Nations by the Laval Government, and the occupation of the Rhineland by Germany in March 1936 caused an increasing number of people in the villages as well as the towns to turn towards the Popular Front. Under the pressure of mass feeling Laval was compelled to pass a bill dissolving the Fascist leagues. At the same time the organisational split in the trade-union movement was healed. The stage was set for the parliamentary elections of May last year.

The electoral campaign was waged by both sides with the utmost energy. A record number of candidates were in the field. The agreed programme which the parties of the People's Front put before the electorate included the following:

- (1) The introduction of collective agreements and holidays with pay for the workers.
- (2) The introduction of the forty-hour week, with a view to reducing unemployment.
- (3) The drawing up of extensive plans for public works and the allocation of the necessary funds.
- (4) The nationalisation of the war industries.
- (5) The revision of the decree-laws of the Doumergue-Laval period.
- (6) The raising of the prices of the most important agricultural products to their pre-crisis level.
- (7) The alteration of the statutes of the Bank of France so as to take control of the bank out of the hands of a tiny oligarchy.
- (8) The disbanding and disarming of the Fascist leagues.
- (9) As regards foreign policy; international collaboration of France within the framework of the League of Nations, in support of peace on the basis of collective security and the indivisibility of peace; the extension of mutual assistance pacts open to all after the manner of the Franco-Soviet pact.

Such were the broad lines of the general appeal. The programme in detail was, however, much more specific. That portion which affected the peasants was formulated as follows:

“Revalorisation of the products of the land combined with a struggle against speculation and the high cost of living, with a view to lessening the gap between wholesale and retail prices, to doing away with the levy taken by speculation on both producers and consumers. Creation of a national wheat bureau. Support for the agricultural co-operatives. Delivery of fertilisers at cost price by the national nitrate and potash boards. Control and tarification of selling-prices of superphosphate and other fertilisers. Development of the *crédit agricole*. Reduction of farm rents. Suspension of distraints and accommodation for debtors.”

The reader, by now familiar with the force with which any programme which seems to promise peace appeals to the rural population, will not have failed to note the possibilities for the *Front Populaire* which arose from a clear enunciation of the bases of its international policy. The more so that the policy of M. Laval in regard to Italy seemed to have failed all along the line. Not only had Ethiopia, an ancient ally of France, been sacrificed under the most tragic circumstances, but the friendship of Italy, so persistently sought as a counter to the threat from Germany, had not prevented the sensational military occupation of the Rhineland in March. There is still, by the way, a tendency in Great Britain to assume that the French people were less shocked by the sufferings of the Ethiopians than our own public. Such a misconception is understandable so long as judgment is based on a perusal of the press, which, with the exception of the organs of the *Front Populaire*, was noticeably pro-Italian. In point of fact, however, the man-in-the-street, particularly in the towns, was extremely moved. Even before the outbreak of hostilities there was an occasion upon which indoor meetings of protest held simultaneously in four of the largest halls in Paris were packed out. It was on his Abyssinian policy that Laval was overthrown in the Chamber, and in the spring of 1936, Captain Dumont, who had accompanied the present writer on a delegation to Addis Ababa, fulfilled over a hundred engagements in France to speak on Abyssinia, and in the aggregate must have addressed well over 100,000 people.

It will be noticed also that in its appeal to the peasantry the *Front Populaire* put the revalorisation of agricultural produce in the forefront of its programme. In view of the still-continuing depression, which had lasted for a long time, it was inevitable that this should be so. The other

points in the programme were of a character to gain the support of much of the middle peasantry as well as of the very poor. Turning again to the general programme, points 1 and 2, which were essentially working-class demands, were calculated to enlist the sympathy of the agricultural labourers.

The results of the election are too recent history to require detailed recapitulation. Suffice it to mention here that the parties of the *Front Populaire* received in the aggregate 1,332,957 more votes than their adversaries. Of the three main parties only the Radical-Socialists lost a large number of votes. This is understandable when it is remembered that they had been deeply implicated in the Stavisky scandals which came to light only two years earlier, and, perhaps still more disastrous to their fortunes, that they had only recently broken away from the unpopular governments of Doumergue and Laval.

There is no doubt that the *Front Populaire* emerged from the elections, not only with a crushing superiority in the towns, but also with at least a bare majority behind them in the villages. Within the *Front Populaire* itself, it is noteworthy that the Socialist Party had become as strong amongst the peasants as the Radicals.

Although coming some way behind the other parties the Communist Party also very greatly increased its influence in the rural areas, claiming in this sphere the tripling of its vote since the previous elections of 1932. Such results were undoubtedly the reward of exceptional initiative displayed by individual members of the party, who, with almost no organisation behind them, set to work to carry their party's campaign into even the remotest mountain villages. Thus in one constituency in the south, the Communist candidate Blachon, put forward by the local organisation of the party which numbered

only forty-five members at the time, succeeded by dint of arduous campaigning amongst the inhabitants of 148 villages, in raising the Communist vote from 1,008 in 1932 to 5,485, in the first round, he being next behind the Socialist, in whose favour he later withdrew. Again in Brittany, a stronghold of conservatism, Le Quéménts, the Communist candidate in one of the Vannes constituencies, which is predominantly rural, polled 476 votes for his party as against 148 cast in 1932.

Yet outstanding as was the victory of the *Front Populaire*, the elections disclosed once again the strength of the conservative forces in the north-west. During the Revolution of 1789-1794, the power of the nobility and of the clergy had been great enough to beat back the waves of the agrarian revolution. It had taken the Republic and Napoleon long years of costly effort to crush out the resistance of the *chouans* in La Vendée. To this day the soil of Normandy and Brittany still largely remains in the possession of the feudal owners. Here the *Front Populaire* was swamped by the votes of the Right parties. In sixteen departments the candidates of these parties were returned with overwhelming majorities, securing from 50 to 89 per cent of the votes cast, according, usually, as to whether there were one or more candidates in the field. Wherever the Catholic Church was strong, there as a rule the *Front Populaire* was weak. Alsace and Lorraine were amongst the areas where the Right parties kept a footing.

Readers familiar with the important rôle of national minority movements in the political life of certain countries may well be wondering at this stage whether nothing has to be said regarding the existence of such movements in France. Is there not such a movement, for instance, in Brittany? It is difficult to be precise in this matter. But to begin with it is quite safe to say that France has no

national problem in any way approaching in gravity the Irish question as it affects Great Britain. This may seem not a little surprising when it is remembered that the annexation of Corsica (a purely Italian-speaking island at the time) by France preceded by only three decades the incorporation of Ireland into the United Kingdom. Other important Italian-speaking areas—Nice and Savoy—became French territory only eighty years ago. In the extreme south-west the Basques have preserved their national culture, and largely their language, since the Middle Ages. The same is fairly true of the Bretons in the north-west.

Yet the fact remains that in none of these areas can there be distinguished at the present time any strong movement in favour either of partial or total autonomy. The nearest approach to anything of the sort occurred in Brittany a few years ago. But the movement there was largely confined to the cultural sphere, was in essence artificial, and has since relapsed into complete insignificance.

To all intents and purposes, therefore, the national minority question is only important for France in the east. What however, is the position in those hotly-contested territories which lie athwart the Vosges mountains and extend in the upper and middle reaches of the Rhine up to the very banks of the river?

Ever since the accession of the Bourbon house to the throne of France, a deliberate aim of foreign policy was the conquest of adequate strategic frontiers. On the east the coveted goal was the left bank of the Rhine, regardless of the fact that the Rhine was then a purely German river, and the people of Alsace almost indistinguishable from any other people inhabiting the centre of Europe and speaking German as their mother-tongue.

Cardinal Richelieu and his successors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries steadily pursued this policy

of expansion towards the Rhine in spite of occasional setbacks, but it was only with the final settlement arrived at after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 that Alsace and Lorraine became definitively part of France, and the French title acknowledged by the Hapsburg Emperor and the King of Prussia.

The French Revolution had been welcomed with enthusiasm by the Rhenish population, and was doubtless in a considerable degree the reason why a German-speaking people should have become reconciled, as they undoubtedly were, to their new allegiance.

However that may be, by 1870 Alsace and Lorraine had become thoroughly integrated into French national life, and the subsequent forcible annexation of these provinces by militarist Prussia was far from popular with the inhabitants. In the parliamentary elections of February 8th, 1871, Alsace voted out and out for Gambetta, the man who appeared most inflexibly to oppose capitulation to the Prussian demands. So much so that love for France 'the country of the Revolution' persisted through the whole half-century of Prussian rule, and was certainly not abated by the manners of the Prussian official caste in its dealings with the inhabitants of what it regarded as conquered territory.

Thus, although they had succeeded to some extent in re-imposing the German language, the Prussian conquerors had not gained the goodwill of the Alsatians. Forming a dissatisfied national minority within the German Reich, they contributed not a little to the defeat of Germany in the Great War.

The re-union of the people of Alsace and Lorraine to France in 1918 was willingly accepted by the majority of the people at the time. The trouble began when the people, not least the urban middle-class and the peasantry, came



to realise that for the interests which dominated French policy the return of Alsace and Lorraine meant, primarily, access to the potash deposits of the former, to the iron ores of the latter. Far from welcoming the addition of population on the other hand, the prevailing tendency was to regard the competition of these provinces in the domain of agriculture and light industry as vexations.

The higher posts in the administration being in the hands of Frenchmen without any local affinities, it became an easy matter to instal a *régime* of inferiority. The textile industry of Alsace, bereft of its former market in Germany, was allowed to stagnate; no facilities were forthcoming for the Alsatian peasantry to dispose of their wines and other produce at reasonable prices.

Under these circumstances a tendency towards autonomy, towards being 'neither German nor French', soon began to manifest itself.

Such was the position before the advent to power of the Hitler *régime* in Germany. Since then the situation has changed considerably. The sweeping Nazi success in the Saar plebiscite undoubtedly created a profound impression in Alsace and Lorraine; this was accentuated when it became clear to the Alsatian peasantry that they had now lost the Saar as a market for their products.

The movement towards autonomy tended to come more and more under the influence of Berlin.

"Hitler has gained strong positions in Alsace . . . whole packs of German plain-clothes men, spies and propagandists, are working in Alsace. The separatist newspapers are directed and subsidised from Berlin. The strongest propaganda is carried on by the Evangelical Clergy who openly favour National-Socialism. The ex-serviceman's unions, in which officers and non-commissioned officers of the old German Army have the

main influence, are the stronghold of National-Socialist propaganda. Goebbels expends large sums of money in order to accommodate Alsatian families in Germany during their vacation, and here they are skilfully plied with propaganda. The Strasbourg broadcasting station, which is clumsily managed, is hardly listened to at all; going down the street of an evening one hears radio programmes from Germany in every house and every restaurant."<sup>1</sup>

It was against this background that the French Communist Party in the autumn of 1936 organised an extensive campaign of meetings throughout Alsace, designed to counter the growing Nazi influence. That these meetings were largely curtailed as a result of action by the Blum Government suggests that National-Socialist feeling was a power to be reckoned with. On the other hand it is only fair to record that such Communist meetings as did take place passed off without incident, and indeed showed that amongst the working-class, at least, strong sympathy with France and the Popular Front persisted.

Recent events are likely to profoundly modify the situation not only in Alsace-Lorraine, but in other parts as well. The Easter Encyclical of Pius XI has awakened many French Catholics to the real menace to their faith which National-Socialism represents. It must be remembered that the parties of the Right have consistently preached an attitude of moderation towards the Hitler and Mussolini dictatorships and have even gone out of their way to sing their praises. Now that the Nazis are beginning to appear to the French Catholics in their true colours, their loyalty to the parties which have shown partiality for the Fascist *régime* has been rudely shaken. This is particularly so in Alsace, whose close proximity to Westphalia, the centre of the most bitter persecution of their

<sup>1</sup> "Hitler in Alsace," an article by H. Eberlein.

co-religionists, renders it impossible to hide the truth from the Catholic peasantry.

In the south-west, amongst the French-speaking Basques, the effect of the wanton massacres of their Spanish brothers can scarcely be imagined, but must already have gone far towards alienating the Catholic elements from the Right parties, and therefore towards driving them into the Popular Front.

Reference has already been made in Chapter V to the effects of the victory of the *Front Populaire* in the field of agricultural trade-unionism. The strikes of May and June last year have been succeeded by others, notable amongst them a large-scale strike of the gum-tappers in the south-west. Nor is the situation by any means stabilised in the important region round Paris. A letter of the agricultural union draws the attention of the Prime Minister in strong terms to a recent circular of the employers' organisation in the region north-east of Paris. The employers, following the tactics employed by some of the Spanish landlords a year previously, were threatening to leave their land uncultivated. The circular to which the trade-union took exception contained the following passage:

"Threatened by the trade-unionists with a strike, the national group of agriculturists north-east of Paris has passed a resolution, unanimously declaring their intention of abandoning their land rather than surrender to demands which circumstances do not even permit them to discuss."

In reply to this threat the Union in its letter to the Premier declares its inability to admit

"that at the whim of a few owners, stretches of the richest lands in France should become unproductive at a time when our country and our people have such great need of the products of the soil."

There are many other indications that the peasant world is developing its political consciousness very rapidly as a result of the elections and the tireless propaganda of the Left parties. Amongst the youth, in particular, a big movement is developing, and the joint paper of the Socialist and Communist youth, *L'Avant Garde*, is to be found in many villages. So is *Paix et Liberté*, a popular illustrated weekly published by the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement.

Most significant of all, perhaps, is the increasing degree to which the womenfolk are becoming interested in politics. Towards the end of 1936 I was informed in a village near Tours that it was becoming quite common to find considerable numbers of peasant women snatching a few hours off from their domestic duties in order to attend a near-by meeting of the Popular Front. Such a thing had never before been known in those parts. Similar information was given me as to the state of affairs even in conservative Brittany, though there, it was emphasised, the situation varied greatly in different areas and sometimes between one village and the next.

Although women in France are still without the franchise, and for reasons into which it is perhaps unnecessary to enter here are in no immediate likelihood of winning it, the Women's Movement against War and Fascism, which seeks to raise both the economic and social status of women has grown enormously, and is rapidly penetrating into all parts of the country. The national committee now has affiliated to it 2,000 local committees, many of which are in rural areas: the attractive photogravure monthly which it publishes has attained a circulation of 140,000 copies.

In the Government formed by M. Blum at the end of May, 1936, both the General Confederation of Labour

and the Communist Party, it will be remembered, declined to participate although they promised their loyal support. Thrown back on the Socialist and Radical groupings, M. Blum chose as his Minister of Agriculture a young member of his own Socialist Party, M. Georges Monnet. The new Minister had plenty to do on assuming office. The situation with which he had to deal has already been examined in Chapter IV. As regards the peasantry the two most outstanding measures of the Government were the law of August 15th, 1936, instituting the Grain Bureau, and that of August 20th affording facilities to debtors. It is undoubtedly the former of these two laws which has most impressed the peasantry with the good intentions of the *Front Populaire* in their regard. As it turned out the wheat harvest had been well up to the average in quite a number of departments. Where this has been the case the farmers have benefited very considerably from the re-valorisation. A wheat-grower, for example, who was able to market 200 quintal (the average yield from 28 acres) would stand to have received about 10,000 francs more in hard cash this last season than he obtained the year before. And not only wheat, but most other kinds of produce also, have risen considerably in value. The rise coincided with the advent of the Blum Government and the increased purchasing-power of the industrial working-class since the strike wave and the reduction in unemployment. With more ready cash at his disposal than he has had for a long time past, the cultivator is little disposed to criticise the economic policy of the Government of the day, which he has found more favourable to his interests than the deflationary policies of Doumergue and Laval.

Nevertheless, as might be expected, there are flies in the ointment. One is that only a minority of the farmers

in a bad wheat year (and 1936 was a bad year taking the country as a whole) are sellers of wheat. All who are not sellers, on the other hand, if they consume white bread, are consumers of wheat, and for these the rise in price has been not an advantage but a disadvantage. For with the rise in the price of wheat, the retail price of bread has of course had to be advanced also. Another matter which has been the cause of a good deal of dissatisfaction has been the action of certain wheat-marketing co-operatives in charging an excessive amount for handling grain on behalf of their members and users. Such practices (which in some cases may have had political motives underlying them and may have arisen from a desire to discredit the Popular Front) are, however, the exception and not the rule.

Generally speaking the institution of the new system of price-regulation has been hailed by the peasants as a noteworthy achievement.

Again, although limited in its application and not always fully understood by the peasants, the new law relating to the relief of debtors has likewise eased the situation. What has already been achieved is regarded as a foretaste of still better things to come, and the passage of measures such as the old-age pension, the reform of the law relating to leaseholds and *métayage*, and the collective contracts, which Parliament is still considering, is being awaited in a spirit of hopeful anticipation. Really adequate legislation covering the field of insurance against natural calamities is another demand of which much is being heard. In this direction also the present Government has held out the hope that it will be able to achieve something at a not too distant date.

What has been the effect of the change in the political atmosphere on the prospects of action by the peasantry

as a whole in furtherance of their cause and for a solution of those manifold problems, some urgent, others less so, which have already been examined?

As has been shown, practically all large-scale organisation of the peasant masses has hitherto been confined to the economic sphere. And yet the net result has been the growth, not of a single organisation representing the peasantry as a whole, but of three groups, relations between which are confessedly difficult. Although none of the three great peasant organisations, the *Union Nationale*, the *Confédération Nationale*, nor the *Fédération Nationale* claims to have a political programme, a detached observer cannot fail to remark the very strong affinities which exist between these organisations and the main political groupings. The *Union Nationale des Agriculteurs de France*, for example, is closely associated with the parties of the extreme Right, while the *Fédération de la Mutualité et de la Co-opération Agricoles* has a pronounced Radical-Socialist flavour, its leading members having held office in former Radical Cabinets.

How are the great masses of cultivators, small and medium, which are at present grouped in these three separate organisations, to be brought together? How will they learn to work, harmoniously and efficaciously, for the attainment of those reforms which will one day ensure for them the standard of security, well-being, and humane culture to which they have so long aspired?

To attempt to give a complete answer to such a question would at this stage be to launch into the realm of speculation. Nevertheless it would be entirely wrong to assume there are no indications at all as to how unity is going to come about. There are, for instance, one or two important departmental organisations of the peasantry which, while in the habit of co-operating more or less

closely with the big central bodies, have always been careful to avoid being identified with any single one of them. Such is the peasant syndicate in the Indre; such also the *Union des Paysans de l'Yonne*. The latter organised in July 1936 a mass meeting in the market at Auxerre which was attended by 9,000 peasant cultivators of all shades of opinion. The resolution, passed unanimously at this great gathering, stressed, above all, the importance of re-valorisation, and went on to urge the adoption of reforms of the same nature as are envisaged in the programme of the *Front Populaire*. Significantly the resolution concludes by expressing the sympathy of those present "with the other workers of the Nation", thus laying the emphasis on the necessity for the peasantry of seeking its own well-being in close collaboration with the industrial working-class.

It would seem indeed that herein lies the real solution of the problem. Sectional interests have clearly proved in the past too strong to permit of the great mass of the peasantry building up its united force in reliance on its own powers alone. Now, however, that working-class unity in France is a reality, and the General Confederation of Labour has become overwhelmingly representative of the entire mass of proletarians, of the Government employees, the technical and managerial staffs no less than of the manual workers in industry, the C.G.T. tends to exert an almost irresistible power of attraction over the minds of the peasants. The peasants see in this powerful organisation the living proof that unity opens the way as of magic to the conquest of social reforms hitherto deemed unobtainable.

"The Matignon agreements," exclaimed M. Renaud Jean in his report to the Congress of the C.G.P.T. last



January, "the great working-class reforms of June 1936, were won in the heat of struggle by millions of workers occupying the factories, or ready in their turn to go into action. Where is the organisation able to mobilise one tenth of the farmers, to group them in powerful demonstrations should the law on rent-reform meet, as is to be anticipated, with the resistance of the Senate? Where is the organisation which in similar circumstances could call on the *métayers* to demonstrate in favour of the reform of *métayage*? the peasant householders for family allotments, the old people, supported by the young, for pensions?

"The unity of the peasantry is an indispensable necessity. . . ."

Is it going very wide of the mark to suggest that the natural tendency will be for more and more of the peasant organisations, hitherto unable to reach agreement amongst themselves, to seek an alliance with the C.G.T., now incontestably the most powerful mass organisation in the country? Already the C.G.T. has certain definite organisational links with the agricultural population. Over 180,000 agricultural labourers are enrolled in its ranks. Many of these are looking forward to the day when they will themselves own or rent a modest few acres. Again there are the agricultural specialists of one kind and another, who play an important rôle in agricultural economy in these times. These also are now organised in the C.G.T., and are in the position of being able to bring influence to bear on the peasant organisations with which they are in close contact.

It need not necessarily be assumed, however, that the economic organisations of the peasantry, whether on the national or the regional scale, are likely to evince a desire for organisational fusion with the C.G.T. That indeed would seem extremely improbable. Yet the fact remains

that the peasant world is rapidly coming to realise that only through concerted action on the political plane are the reforms which it desires likely to be realised.<sup>1</sup> What more likely, then, than that the peasant organisations should get into touch with the C.G.T. with a view to the elaboration of joint campaigns in furtherance of certain specified demands for which there exists widespread support? As we have seen, there are many such demands which are even now being put forward. Should the various peasant organisations (which to-day embrace many persons who have acquired a thorough political training in the parties of the Left) arrive at the point when they will be prepared to negotiate with the C.G.T., there is no reason to suppose that the latter will not be ready to meet them.

In some such manner, it may be surmised, will the long process of peasant organisation in defence of peasant interests and in pursuit of a standard of life commensurate with peasant effort, eventually be consummated.

Who knows? It may well be that the liberation of the peasant from the grip of conditions which are altogether out of keeping with twentieth-century possibilities is even now in sight!

<sup>1</sup> The *Temps* of May 5th last, reporting the annual conference of the Right-wing *Union Nationale* at Caen, refers to the strong appeals for peasant unity made by the President and other speakers, one of whom emphasised "the urgency of a change of policy towards the peasantry . . . failing which we shall soon be faced with the disappearance of the peasantry and the ruin of France".

## CONCLUSION

**D**URING THE LAST twenty months the struggle between Capital and Labour in France has assumed such vast proportions that it has tended to obscure the existence of other contradictions which are also challenging the present basis of French society.

The lightning rapidity with which the great wave of strikes (which had their origin in the engineering factories of the Paris region) extended throughout the whole country, embracing every phase of economic activity, left the world gasping with amazement. These strikes, carried through with a remarkable display of discipline, and employing the new 'stay-in' tactic, resulted in substantial victories being achieved by Labour. Not only was it able to obtain for the first time general acceptance of the principle of collective bargaining in industrial relations, but the workers secured also the forty-hour week and the right to paid annual holidays, not to mention substantial increases in their wages.

As a result of these achievements, won in the first instance in economic struggle, and later secured by the passage through Chamber and Senate of the appropriate legislative measures to regularise them, the membership of the now unified trade-unions has increased by leaps and bounds. The General Confederation of Labour numbers some six million men and women among its adherents. And these are drawn from a very wide social field. Besides the manual workers in the factories and the mines, the Confederation has enrolled in its ranks the transport

workers and the state employees.<sup>1</sup> Affiliated to it are the organisations of the distributive workers, of office staffs, and a large majority of technicians of one kind and another and qualified engineers. The C.G.T. is unquestionably the most powerful social force in the country.

Thus, since the advent of the *Front Populaire* Government a profound shifting of the balance between Capital and Labour has taken place, which has been wholly to the advantage of the latter.

During the same period, however, has the position of the peasantry remained unchanged? Or are its prospects of survival greater or less than they were a year ago? Such questions cannot be answered merely on a consideration of events which have taken place during the last twenty months. So much must be clear to anyone who has studied the process of peasant economic and political evolution as it has been described in the present book. Nothing approaching the *tempo* of working-class action could be expected, nor would be found, among the peasantry. The conditions of existence amongst the small and scattered village communities altogether preclude anything of the kind.

Yet it would be surely wrong to assume that the world of the peasant is static. Even within the last two years there have obviously been notable changes. The institution of the *Office du Blé* has undoubtedly provided a strong incentive to further steps being taken towards more complete economic organisation. The big rise in the price of wheat, for which the establishment of the *Office* was mainly responsible, and similar rises in the price of other important

<sup>1</sup> In fact, the State employees are organised under the auspices of the C.G.T., even though legislative sanction has not yet been obtained.—N. H.

agricultural products, due to other causes, have changed a feeling of despondency and listlessness into one of hope for the future.

It cannot be too strongly emphasised, however, that the short view is not the correct view when it comes to examining the peasant question in France. The problems of the peasantry have developed slowly out of circumstances which already belong to past history. As the problems themselves have come into being, gradually, through the passage of several decades of time, so likewise the processes which are working for a solution of them did not begin yesterday—in 1935 or 1936—but have their origins in initiatives taken by people most of whom are no longer living.

The French Revolution of 1789–1794 was really two revolutions in one. In the first place it represented the emancipation of the commercial and industrial interests from the shackles of an outworn feudal system. In the second place it was an agrarian revolution, involving on a very large scale the distribution of land, hitherto practically monopolised by the Crown, Church, and Nobility amongst the land-hungry peasants of the Third Estate.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was thus a very numerous class of peasant proprietors, practically free of debt, able to find a ready market for their surplus produce in the rapidly growing towns, and in turn providing a market for the disposal of urban manufactures.

The interests of the peasants were at that time somewhat safeguarded owing to the circumstance that the victory of the bourgeoisie was as yet incomplete. With the overthrow of Napoleon and the return of the Bourbon kings, the old noble families were for a time able to recover *some of their influence. They were as yet little interested*

in commerce and industry, but they were greatly interested in land. It was not to their interest that the price of agricultural products should fall, since their own revenues were derived from land-rents, and, in some cases, from the direct exploitation of their estates.

However, by the middle of the century, and after two more revolutions, the influence of the manufacturers finally became uppermost in deciding State policy. The reign of Napoleon III marked the change-over in France from a policy of protection to one of complete free-trade.

At this point the situation of the peasantry begins to get critical. The law of succession tends constantly to split up peasant holdings, as the father dies and is succeeded by several children each of whom must have his portion of land. Agriculture is subjected to the full force of competition from the new areas in America and Australia and North Africa which are rapidly being developed. To add to the distress the vines are attacked by the disease *phylloxera* which causes immense damage.

In such circumstances large sections of the peasantry are faced with ruin. Hundreds of thousands abandon the unequal contest and drift off into the towns, to find employment in Government service, in commerce and in industry.

But the passionate attachment of the peasant to the land which he cultivates induces the majority to hang on. Many seek a way out by artificially limiting the size of their families. Malthusianism becomes an established practice amongst the farming population in such provinces, as Normandy. Sometimes on the death of a parent it is arranged by the children amongst themselves that only one will carry on the farm, the remainder voluntarily leaving it in search of fresh outlets.

Then, as we have seen, the peasant is gradually driven by force of circumstances to take a more positive line. He begins, hesitantly at first, to seek to defend his position by combining with his fellows for limited ends of an economic character. After a difficult beginning the movement towards economic co-operation makes headway. The credit banks, mutual insurance societies, syndicates and co-operatives develop apace.

Pursuit of these new economic activities turns the attention of the peasantry towards politics. They are activities which sooner or later demand legislative sanction and encouragement. Thus is formed the somewhat nebulous alliance between the working peasantry and the urban middle-class under the banner of the Radical-Socialist Party. It is the Radical Party, "guardian of the tradition of 89," as Albert Bayet writes, "which is above all . . . an agrarian party, *the* agrarian party."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed the peasants had good reason to be grateful to Radical reformers on account of quite a number of important laws which they were able to get through Parliament. The most important have already been described in Chapter V.

The view has already been expressed in these pages that the permanent achievement standing to the credit of this alliance of peasantry and middle-class will prove to have been the creation of strong and numerous cadres amongst the former. Fifty years ago the French peasantry, despite its great numerical strength, was almost powerless to protect its own interests. Can it be said that such is still the case to-day? To me it seems the answer lies most emphatically in the negative. And for what reason? Because the long process of economic organisation has trained tens of thousands of peasant cultivators in the art

<sup>1</sup> *Le Radicalisme*, Valois, Paris, 1932.

of leadership, has taught them to take the collective view instead of thinking only of the interests of themselves and their own families. They have become familiarised with the conduct of business on a substantial scale, and have begun to make acquaintance with modern technical processes. Equally important they have begun to discern the close connection between economic activity and political action.

All this is surely of first-rate importance. But it is wise to note at the same time the failures of the Radical movement. Greatest of these was its inability to effect the unification of the peasant organisations. Thus, instead of one single organisation having been evolved, grouping the sum-total of peasant societies, there still exist several large associations, between which the current of division runs deep. It is probable that the uncompromising anti-clericalism of the Radical Party was largely responsible; its adoption of an attitude on the religious issue which did not take sufficient account of the fact that the peasantry was largely Catholic. It was consequently a comparatively easy matter for the conservative landowners who, towards the close of the nineteenth century, already included a great number of bankers and industrialists, to split the peasant movement, its syndicates, its co-operatives, and credit institutions into two very nearly equal halves. The *Union Nationale des Agriculteurs de France* is, as has been shown,<sup>1</sup> a body whose leadership is drawn from the ranks of the landed gentry and high finance. And the Union has grouped within its fold anything up to a million of the peasant households of France.

It has also to be admitted that the corruption which has on more than one occasion discredited the Radicals, evidenced by scandals like the Panama and Stavisky

<sup>1</sup> Vide p. 70.



affairs, has not tended to strengthen peasant belief in the possibility of effective political action, but has on the contrary weakened that belief considerably.

The peasant has often been forced to witness with dismay the headlong retreat of the Radicals and their allies at moments of political crisis. Such a retreat occurred in 1926 after the collapse of the franc: a similar one in 1934 in face of the agitation developed by Colonel de la Roque and the Fascist leagues.

The Parliamentary elections of 1936 clearly mark a new stage in the political evolution of the peasantry. In voting for the *Front Populaire* candidate the peasant entered into a new alliance. Instead of the old alliance with the urban middle-class, in which he had largely lost faith, he began to see hope in a much wider alliance, in which the working-class was also included, and which had in fact been created and led by it.

He has seen the new alliance achieve spectacular triumphs, and in what, judged especially by peasant standards, in an exceedingly short space of time. Isolated formerly from contact with the workers, the peasant has, thanks largely to the advent of the motor car, come to live in a world less remote. At the same time working-class propaganda is at last reaching him on a scale which has never obtained hitherto. Three great daily newspapers, *Le Peuple*, *Le Populaire*, and *L'Humanité* carry working-class ideas into the remotest parts of the country. There is a mass of other periodicals doing the same thing. This year the Communist Party has begun to publish a special weekly paper *La Terre*.<sup>1</sup> It has already a circulation of 45,000. For the approaching cantonal elections which were due to take place last October, the same party made a special effort. At these elections one half of the *conseils d'arrondisse-*

<sup>1</sup> "The Land."—N. H.

ment and of the *conseils généraux* were to be renewed throughout the whole of France. Through the mouth of M. Jacques Duclos, one of its secretaries, the Communist Party declared its desire

“that the campaign for these elections should bear the character of action particularly directed in favour of the peasant masses and of the middle-classes. . . . Everywhere the Communists will have to give heed to the voice from the villages of France, will have to listen to the complaints of the peasant masses, whose living conditions ought to be greatly improved, and many schemes included in the programme of public works to that end. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

In so far as the religious question has been one in the past to divide the peasants from the industrial proletariat, there are many signs that this is becoming less and less the case. The Communist Party in particular, and to some extent the Socialist Party also, are engaged in making determined advances to the Catholics. But even more significant has been the revolt of Catholic opinion in France against the persecution of the Catholics in Germany and the destruction of the Catholic population of Guernica by the Fascist forces in Spain. These events have created an exceedingly painful impression upon Catholic opinion, have caused it to become increasingly critical of the politicians of the Right who support the Nazis and Franco, and more disposed than hitherto to accept the advances being made from the side of the *Front Populaire*.

Important measures, it has been stated, are now before Parliament, measures designed to deal with certain urgent peasant problems. Some of them involve the allocation of large sums of money by the State treasury. It is being suggested that in the present state of the public

<sup>1</sup> *L'Humanité*, April 5th, 1937.

finances the Government of the day will never take the necessary steps, steps which will be vigorously contested in the Senate and elsewhere to pursue these reforms to their conclusion. Should the Government eventually abandon the endeavour, it is argued, the support which it has been getting from the peasantry will be lost. Those who believe they see such a possibility arising at some not very distant date speak also of the difficulties which may be in store for the *Front Populaire* in the colonial sphere. It is common knowledge that amongst the millions of French subjects in Africa, and Asia, and elsewhere, great hopes were entertained of the *Front Populaire*. It was hoped that with such a Government in power concessions, going a long way towards satisfying the political, economic, and social aspirations of the colonial peoples, would be rapidly forthcoming. The nature of the alliance represented by the *Front Populaire*, which includes many currents of opinion in no way disposed to bring in radical changes in the colonies, has, however, proved an obstacle to rapid progress, though it would not be correct to say that nothing at all has been accomplished.

However that may be, the hopes of the political opponents of the *Front Populaire* are largely placed on a growing disillusionment of both the peasantry in France itself and the colonial populations with the present Government.

There are even some who compare the situation now being reached in France with that which obtained in Italy in 1922, and which was followed within a few months by the defeat of the working-class parties and the handing over of State power to Mussolini and his Fascist organisation.

Should it really come about that the *Front Populaire* Government, yielding to the pressure of the financial interests, as M. Herriot's Cabinet yielded in 1926, finally

abandoned its efforts to help the peasantry, it is of course certain that a very dangerous situation for the future collaboration of the peasantry with the working-class would ensue. Those, however, who indulge in such fancies surely overlook two important differences which exist between the present situation in France and that which obtained in Italy before Mussolini came to power. In the first place the Italian working-class was anything but united. Split up into groups mutually quarrelling amongst themselves, it could not possibly act as a centre of attraction around which the organisations of the Italian peasantry (which admittedly were very well developed, as are those of the French peasantry to-day) could rally.

But there is an even more vital difference between the two situations: there was not then, in Italy in 1922, as there is now in France, the appalling menace of external danger. The peasant, passionately attached to the cause of peace, is no less passionately determined to defend to his last drop of blood the land on which his livelihood depends. So long as the working-class appears to him as the most powerful factor in the country, as the one most willing and most capable of defending the national territory from the attack of enemy powers, so long will his instinctive thought be to support the Government which is responsible for the defence of the country's frontiers. The peasant well knows the vast sums which provision for that defence is costing. He knows that so long as the danger continues there can be little prospect of taxation being lightened, of sufficient funds being available to assure any decisive improvement of his lot.

All he asks for the moment, therefore, is that he should be treated on an equal footing with other categories of producers. It would be strange indeed if the *Front Populaire* were not able to satisfy so modest a demand.



## APPENDIX A

The following are the principal provisions of a collective agreement signed by the Employers' and Workers' associations in the horticultural industry:

### COLLECTIVE LABOUR CONTRACT

The Union of Horticultural Producers of the Paris Region, acting on behalf of the employers . . . and the Federal Section of the Working Gardeners of the Paris Region, acting on behalf of the workmen, make known their acceptance of the following Collective Agreement which governs the working conditions of horticultural workers in the Paris Region.

#### A.

##### *For Horticultural Workers*

##### *1. Working Hours.*

The maximum is fixed at 8 hours per day or 48 hours per week, saving that in periods of high-pressure when there is no unemployment, overtime may be required, to be paid time-and-a-third. No time will be allowed for meals.

##### *2. Minimum Wages.*

Unskilled Labourer	.	.	.	43 francs per day
Qualified Specialist	.	.	.	48 " " "
Foreman	.	.	.	54 " " "

##### *Women.*

Unskilled	.	.	.	.	30 " " "
Skilled	.	.	.	.	35 " " "

*Boilermen.**by the month*

Youths 14 to 15 . . . . .	20 francs per day
„ 16 . . . . .	28 „ „ „
„ 17 to 18 . . . . .	32 to 35 „ „ „

A workman over 18 years of age to be paid adult rates. . . . Gloves and waterproof clothing to be supplied when necessary. . . .

*Office-Staff.**francs*

Correspondence clerks and typists . . . . .	1,000 per month
Ditto (beginners) . . . . .	900 „ „
Shorthand typists . . . . .	1,100 „ „

Workers discharged owing to lack of work must be the first to be re-engaged when work is resumed.

Under no circumstances is the conclusion of an agreement to entail a lowering of existing wages.

*Apprenticeship.*

The maintenance in work of a properly trained labour supply is recognised as essential. Employers shall afford facilities to their apprentices to attend training classes during working hours.

Such classes should take place not more than twice-weekly, with a maximum of 2 hours.

Employers shall not engage workmen from outside in the industry while there are working gardeners unemployed. The workmen's delegates are entitled to be consulted with regard to the engagement or dismissal of a workman.

Foreign workmen are to enjoy the same conditions as French workmen.

Eight days notice on either side to be given in the case of day-labourers leaving or being discharged. During this period the workman to be allowed 2 hours daily to look for work. . . .

Every worker, man or woman, is entitled to an annual holiday of 15 days with pay, corresponding to 12 working-days. . . .

The two parties agree to request the Government to apply the legislation on family allowances to agricultural workers on the same scale as for town-workers. . . .

Observance of the law being required of all citizens, the employers hereby recognise freedom of opinion as well as the right of workers to join and remain members of a trade-union. . . .

In all establishments with more than 8 workers, workmen's delegates are to be appointed. . . . Delegates are entitled to approach the management in regard to individual demands covered by laws, decrees, regulations under the labour code, scales of wages and health and safety measures. They may engage the assistance of a representative of their union. Men and women will be eligible to vote if over 18 years of age and with 3 months' employment to their credit on the day of election. . . . Qualification for election is reserved to workers over 21, of French nationality, who have worked 6 months in the establishment. . . .

Arbitral commissions of 6 members, 3 from either party, are constituted with a president appointed by the Prefect. . . . These commissions will have the functions of settling disputes referred to them within the term of the Agreement. . . .



## APPENDIX B

### *Appeal of the Paris Commune to the Peasantry in 1871*

Brother, you are being misled. Our interests are the same. What I am asking for you also want: the emancipation which I demand is yours as well. What does it matter whether it be in the town or in the country that bread and clothing, shelter and relief are lacking for those who produce the world's riches? What does it matter if the oppressor go by the name of big landowner or big industrialist? With you as with us the working-day is long and rude and does not yield even enough to keep body and soul together. For you as for me freedom, leisure, the life of the spirit are lacking. We are still at all times—you and I—in thrall to poverty.

For nearly a hundred years they have been telling you, peasant, and you, country labourer, that property is the sacred reward of work, and you believe it. But open your eyes, turn them on yourself and you will see it is a lie. You are old, you have always worked, your days have been passed, spade or sickle in hand, from morning to night and yet you are not rich, nor have a bite of bread for your old age. All your earnings have gone on the painful effort to bring up the children, of whom conscription will rob you, or perhaps, marrying, they too will lead the same life of a beast of burden that you have led, and will end up as you will—in poverty. For, once the strength of your limbs is spent, you will not be able to get work, your useless old age will be a burden on your children, and soon you will find yourself with hanging head begging from door to door, despised by the more fortunate.

It is not fair, brother peasant! Do you not feel it? So you must see in very truth you are being deceived.

If it were true that property is the reward of work you would own land, you who have worked so hard. Yours would be a nice little house with a bit of garden and a meadow such as has been your dream, your life's passion. You have never been able to afford it though, or if you have it has been at the price of getting yourself hopelessly in debt, with the result that either you or your children after you will be obliged to sell up the home. No, brother, labour does not spell property, property is passed on by chance or by trickery. The rich are idlers, the workers are poor and stay poor, that is the rule, if otherwise, it is the exception.

This is not fair, and that is why Paris, which you accuse on the word of people whose interest it is to deceive you, that is why Paris is up in arms and out to change the laws which vest all power in the rich at the expense of the workers. It is the wish of Paris that the peasant's boy should get as good a schooling as the rich man's son *and free at that*, considering that human knowledge is the common heritage of all men, and is no less useful for getting through life than are the eyes to see with.

Paris would make an end of the king who gets 30 millions of the People's money and enriches his family and his cronies into the bargain. Paris wishes to end this huge expense and thus to lighten taxation.

Paris would put a stop to the payment of salaries of 20,000 francs, 30,000 francs, 100,000 francs, etc., which give one man in the course of a year the maintenance of many families. With the money saved homes could be provided for the aged workers.

Paris insists that no one without property should pay a penny of tax, that he who only possesses a house and garden should likewise pay nothing, that the small income should be lightly taxed, and the whole weight of the taxes should fall on the rich.

Paris demands that it be the Deputies, Senators, and Bonapartists who caused the war who must pay the 5 milliards to Prussia. Let their property be sold for the purpose, and the so-called crown property as well, for which France has no longer need.

Paris demands that justice in future be free and that the People itself choose the judges from honest folk of the neighbourhood.

In short Paris desires—take careful note, worker in the fields, labourer, small proprietor, you who are the prey of usurers, tenant, crop-sharer, all of you who sow, reap, toil, that your finest produce goes to someone who does nothing—Paris wills *the land for the peasant, the tool for the worker, work for all*.

The war which Paris is now waging is war on usury, on deceit, on idleness. You are told: the Parisians, the socialists are despoilers. But, good people, do you not realise who are saying this? Are they not despoilers who do nothing but live and fatten on the labour of others? Have you never heard pickpockets raise the cry of "Stop thief!" and get away while their victim is being arrested?

Yes, the fruits of the earth to those who grow them. To each his due. Work for all.

An end of the very rich, and an end of the very poor.

No work without leisure, no more leisure without work.

It is possible. For it would be better not to believe in anything than to believe that justice is beyond our reach.

Good laws could ensure it, and they will be made when the workers are no longer willing to be duped by the idlers.

And when that happens, you may be assured, brother cultivators, the fairs and markets will be better for those who produce corn and meat than ever they were under emperor or king. For then the worker will be strong and well-fed, and labour will be free of the heavy taxes, dues, and rents which the Revolution by no means brought to an end.

So, dwellers in the countryside, as you see, the cause of Paris is your cause, and Paris works for you as well as for the worker. The generals who are now attacking her are the same who betrayed France. These Deputies whom you have returned without knowing them want

to bring back Henry the Fifth. *If Paris falls, the yoke of misery will lie on your neck, and will pass on to your children.* Please help her, then, to win through, and happen what may remember these words, for there will be revolutions until they come true—"The Land for the Peasant, the Tool to the Worker, Work for All."

THE WORKERS OF PARIS.

## APPENDIX C

### NUMBERS IN USE IN 1929 OF CERTAIN AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS THROUGHOUT FRANCE

#### A. FIELD

<i>Implement</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Number</i>
Ploughs . . . .	Brabant, double . . .	1,190,190
„ . . . .	Multiple . . . .	197,577
Harrows . . . .	Disc . . . .	45,513
Mechanical Sowers . . . .	Line . . . .	268,594
„ „ . . . .	Broadcast . . . .	53,525
Potato-drills. . . . .	. . . . .	7,518
Potato-lifters . . . . .	. . . . .	59,518
Beet-lifters . . . . .	. . . . .	13,439
Hay-cutters . . . . .	. . . . .	1,388,095
Hay-rakes . . . . .	Horse-drawn . . . .	738,575
Reaper-binders . . . . .	. . . . .	420,268
Hay-loaders . . . . .	. . . . .	3,420

#### B. STATIONARY

Threshers, Capacity . . .	Over 10 tons daily . .	12,899
„ „ . . .	4 to 10 tons daily . .	48,362
„ „ . . .	Under 4 tons daily . .	142,244
Grape Presses . . . .	Hand . . . .	368,325
„ „ . . . .	Hydraulic . . . .	7,209
„ „ . . . .	Other types . . . .	11,080
Milking Machines . . . .	. . . . .	3,692
Separators . . . . .	Centrifugal . . . .	665,522

#### C. POWER PLANT

Steam-engines . . . .	Fixed . . . .	1,639
„ „ . . . .	Mobile . . . .	19,203

Internal Combustion .	Liquid Fuel . . .	147,145
„ „ .	Gas . . .	3,441
Agricultural Tractors.	Under 1 h.p. . .	245
„ „ .	1 to 5 h.p. . .	2,243
„ „ .	5 to 10 h.p. . .	4,569
„ „ .	Over 10 h.p. . .	19,735
Light Motor-vans .	Used in agriculture	65,704
Motor-lorries . .	„ „ „	8,641



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